

**THE COMPLEXITIES OF INTERPERSONAL CONFLICTS AS
REFLECTED IN ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S *THE KILLERS***

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ABSTRACT

The Killers is a short story written by Ernest Hemingway with Nick as the main character. The story centers on how fear is glorified through communications in this story. Nick, who is terrified of a word of death, tries to save Ole Anderson who is about to be killed. Nick tells the news to Ole, but he chooses to resign himself to his own death. Humans are filled with complex emotions and this short story indicates various matters of them in the response of death. This article would like to emphasize The Killers as direct reflection of complexities of interpersonal conflicts. By using qualitative methods, the analysis underlines complex ideas behind any communication. Language is not only related to communication, but also the intertwined meanings of known discourse. In conclusion, Hemingway's short story involves various struggles of people who experience interpersonal conflicts around them.

Keyword: *Ernest Hemingway, Interpersonal Conflicts, The Killers*

A. INTRODUCTION

Ernest Miller Hemingway was an American author and journalist. Most of his works always carry a certain dark intent relating to life and its meaning.

Ernest's own intended portrayal of the characters was always 'normal' and 'existed' (Collinge-Germain, 2012). *The Killers* is one of Hemingway's literary works in the form of a short story and published in Scribner's Magazine in 1927. This short story centers on several characters; two assassins named Al and Max who are tasked with killing Ole Anderson, then accidental involvement by three others; Nick, George, and Sam (Hemingway, 1988). This short story implies how each character indicates complex conflict with each other then ends up having odd feelings at the end of the story.

Interpersonal conflict is focused on how communication problems that occur to one person, penetrate into another, and make the conflict related to many people (Brule & Eckstein, 2019; Wilmot & Hocker, 2017). The concept emphasizes dynamic emotions on negative responses intended by a person to another, and causes them to have inappropriate understanding each other because of the problem (Devito et al., 2015; Sharma & Singh, 2019). However, conflict can be a powerful source of communication as it may be a source of greater self-awareness. It is the point in a dialogue in which the volume is raised, the interest is focused, and the need to communicate is dramatic and dramatized. The interpersonal part is an emotional root where a person causes problems that start on him or herself, affects others, and makes it a 'conflict' (Sharma & Singh, 2019; Weixel-Dixon, 2017).

The Killers exposes dialogues in which all characters' problems of communication are caused by one person. Like how Ole Anderson's resignation dampened Nick's courage and caused fear in George as well. Nick may have courage, but his idea will never be realized to better reality as it brings fear to others as well (Hemingway, 1988). Ole totally ignores Nick's courage and soon it will shape others' anxiety as well. The conflict is personal at first, but then one man's courage to change situation appears, then it becomes interpersonal as everyone may feel involved in that situation.

B. METHOD

By using qualitative method, data from each journal is concerned alongside with the development of interpersonal conflict theory and its correlation to the development of the humans' interactions. Online and offline scripts are derived by journals and essays of some psychologist writers who explained interpersonal conflict. Analysis data is formed by reading the short story intensively, comparing the literary work with interpersonal conflict ideas, analyzing the short story, quoting it into the article, and writing a list of references related to both primary and secondary sources of analysis.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Emprises of Internal and External Conflict in *The Killers*

The Killers is a short story written by Ernest Hemingway in 1927 with hallmark of satire, friendship, meaning of death, and other understandings (Hemingway, 1988). This short story exposes a variety of mixed feelings from confusion, sudden courage, change of desires, acceptance of circumstances, and maturity in understanding the situation.

The story begins with the main character, Nick Adams who wants to have dinner at a nearby restaurant owned by George, and suddenly two strangers come at the restaurant, and making the atmosphere a little tight because they address the other characters, in an awkward manner. The two foreigners did not understand how to order food at George's restaurant, but they still ordered it, even if the menu they wanted was always not available, and they launched their annoyance little by little. Those proof are explored in this following sentence;

"What's yours?" George asked them.

"I don't know," one of the men said. "What do you want to eat, Al?"

"I don't know," said Al. "I don't know what I want to eat." (Hemingway, 1988).

"I'll have a roast pork tenderloin with apple sauce and mashed potatoes," the first man said.

"It isn't ready yet."

"What the hell do you put it on the card for?"

"That's the dinner," George explained. "You can get that at six o'clock." (Hemingway, 1988).

George looked at the clock on the wall behind the counter.

"It's five o'clock."

"The clock says twenty minutes past five," the second man said.

"It's twenty minutes fast."

"Oh, to hell with the clock," the first man said. "What have you got to eat?"

"I can give you any kind of sandwiches," George said. "You can have ham and eggs, bacon and eggs, liver and bacon, or a steak."

"Give me chicken croquettes with green peas and cream sauce and mashed potatoes."

"That's the dinner."

"Everything we want's the dinner, eh? That's the way you work it." (Hemingway, 1988).

At the first meeting, one of them gave George a nickname "pretty bright boy", which was meant like bad saying to state that someone is stupid. After that, they start the meal. In the middle of them enjoying the food, Al asks Max what Nick's name is, but Max calls Nick without bothering, calling "bright boy" just like he called George. It can be seen here;

"You're a pretty bright boy, aren't you?"

"Sure," said George.

"Well, you're not," said the other little man. "Is he, Al?"

"He's dumb," said Al. He turned to Nick. "What's your name?"

"Adams."

"Another bright boy," Al said. "Ain't he a bright boy, Max?"

"The town's full of bright boys," Max said. (Hemingway, 1988)

Then Max tells Nick to go around the counter for no reason, and asks Nick a question. They also asked about who was behind the counter as they wanted that guy. The man mentioned by George came out. George asks what they want his chef for, and Al says that he wants the person behind the counter to come. George asked again with some courage saying that Al and Max did not know where they were. Then Max answered again that they knew very well where they were, and they were not silly people here. The situation become a little tight. Those proofs are explored here;

"Hey, bright boy," Max said to Nick. "You go around on the other side of the counter with your boy friend."

"What's the idea?" Nick asked.

"There isn't any idea."

"You better go around, bright boy," Al said. Nick went around behind the counter." (Hemingway, 1988).

"What's the idea?" George asked.

"None of your damned business," Al said. "Who's out in the kitchen?"

"The nigger."

"What do you mean the nigger?"

"The nigger that cooks." (Hemingway, 1988).

"What's the idea?"

"Tell him to come in."

"Where do you think you are?"

"We know damn well where we are," the man called Max said. "Do we look silly?"

"You talk silly," Al said to him. "What the hell do you argue with this kid for? Listen," he said to George, "tell the nigger to come out here." (Hemingway, 1988).

Max takes over the conversation, insisting on George that he must obey them to call the chef who is in the kitchen. George chooses not to argue anymore when he is sure that no one will be hurt here. Those ideas are explored here;

"What are you going to do to him?"

"Nothing. Use your head, bright boy. What would we do to a nigger?"

George opened the slit that Opened back into the kitchen. "Sam," he called. "Come in here a minute." (Hemingway, 1988).

In the next part, Al says he will take Nick and Sam to the back of the counter while George is left with Max in front of the counter. George looked at Max who was sitting in front of the counter table, facing the mirror that had been available there for a long time. He did not see George, but George did not try to do something. Max says why George did not ask anything, and George asking a question. As if to add to the confusion, Max had a dialogue with Al who was behind the counter, throwing questions at each other and George just silently listened. Those are explored in the following;

"I'm going back to the kitchen with the nigger and bright boy," he said. "Go on back to the kitchen, nigger. You go with him, bright boy." The little man walked after Nick and Sam, the cook, back into the kitchen. The door shut after them. The man called Max sat at the counter opposite George. He didn't look at George but looked in the mirror that ran along back of the counter. Henry's had been made over from a saloon into a lunch counter.

"Well, bright boy," Max said, looking into the mirror, "why don't you say something?" "What's it all about?" (Hemingway, 1988).

"Hey, Al," Max called, "bright boy wants to know what it's all about."

"Why don't you tell him?" Al's voice came from the kitchen.

"What do you think it's all about?"

"I don't know."

"What do you think?" (Hemingway, 1988).

Max looked into the mirror all the time he was talking.

"I wouldn't say."

"Hey, Al, bright boy says he wouldn't say what he thinks it's all about."

"I can hear you, all right," Al said from the kitchen. He had propped open the slit that dishes passed through into the kitchen with a catsup bottle. "Listen, bright boy," he said from the kitchen to George. "Stand a little further along the bar. You move a little to the left, Max." He was like a photographer arranging for a group picture.

"Talk to me, bright boy," Max said. "What do you think's going to happen?" (Hemingway, 1988).

Then Max said he meant that they wanted to kill a big Swede named Ole Anderson. George answered all of Al's questions honestly about Ole Anderson's usual schedule of coming to his lunch counter and what time he came. In this kind of situation, George seems to be the opposite of other people's reactions in general. It is not explained how he feels, but from the dialogue listed, George answered everything calmly. It can be seen in this following sentences;

"I'll tell you," Max said. "We're going to kill a Swede. Do you know a big Swede named Ole Anderson?"

"Yes."

"He comes here to eat every night, don't he?"

"Sometimes he comes here."

"He comes here at six o'clock, don't he?"

"If he comes." (Hemingway, 1988).

"What are you going to kill Ole Anderson for? What did he ever do to you?"

"He never had a chance to do anything to us. He never even seen us."

And he's only going to see us once," Al said from the kitchen:

"What are you going to kill him for, then?" George asked.

"We're killing him for a friend. Just to oblige a friend, bright boy."

“Shut up,” said Al from the kitchen. “You talk too goddamn much.”
“Well, I got to keep bright boy amused. Don’t I, bright boy?” (Hemingway, 1988).

“If anybody comes in you tell them the cook is off, and if they keep after it, you tell them you’ll go back and cook yourself. Do you get that, bright boy?”

“All right,” George said. “What you going to do with us afterward?”

“That’ll depend,” Max said. “That’s one of those things you never know at the time.” (Hemingway, 1988).

And they waited until over six o'clock. George did his duty properly. The two assassins sent for Ole Anderson thought maybe Ole Anderson would not come when George said with a little sarcasm that their friend did not come. Those are explored in the following:

George looked up at the clock. It was a quarter past six. The door from the street opened. A streetcar motorman came in.

“Hello, George,” he said. “Can I get supper?”

“Sam’s gone out,” George said. “He’ll be back in about half an hour.”

“I’d better go up the street,” the motorman said. George looked at the clock. It was twenty minutes, past six. (Hemingway, 1988).

“Your friend, Ole Anderson, isn’t going to come.”

“We’ll give him ten minutes,” Max said.

Max watched the mirror and the clock. The hands of the clock marked seven o’clock, and then five minutes past seven.

“Come on, Al,” said Max.

“We better go. He’s not coming.”

“Better give him five minutes,” Al said from the kitchen. (Hemingway, 1988).

The two of them went out the door. George watched them, through the window, pass under the arclight and across the street. In their tight overcoats and derby hats they looked like a vaudeville team. George went back through the swinging door into the kitchen and untied Nick and the cook. (Hemingway, 1988).

After they left, George helps Nick and Sam break free from their bonds, and informs them that the purpose of the two people is to kill Ole Anderson. George advises Nick to see Ole Anderson, but Sam says to stay away from such affairs. Nevertheless, Nick seemed to be given such courage. Nick will go to see Ole Anderson and tell him about this. Here we can see that Nick is someone who will not turn a blind eye. He will set aside his fear though he knows that he could also be in danger because of that. It can be seen in the following sentences;

“They were going to kill Ole Anderson,” George said. “They were going to shoot him when he came in to eat.”

“Ole Anderson?”

"Sure." (Hemingway, 1988).

"Listen," George said to Nick. "You better go see Ole Anderson."

"All right."

"You better not have anything to do with it at all," Sam, the cook, said.

"You better stay way out of it."

"Don't go if you don't want to," George said.

"Mixing up in this ain't going to get you anywhere," the cook said. "You stay out of it."

"I'll go see him," Nick said to George. "Where does he live?" (Hemingway, 1988).

However, when he came to Ole Anderson, the man chose to give up and face it all. He did not want to run anymore. Nick appreciated Ole Anderson's decision, returning to George's lunch counter with the worst feelings over the incident. Those are explored in the following;

"I was up at Henry's," Nick said, "and two fellows came in and tied up me and the cook, and they said they were going to kill you."

It sounded silly when he said it. Ole Anderson said nothing.

"They put us out in the kitchen," Nick went on. "They were going to shoot you when you came in to supper."

Ole Anderson looked at the wall and did not say anything. "George thought I better come and tell you about it."

"There isn't anything I can do about it," Ole Anderson said (Hemingway, 1988).

"Did you tell him about it?" George asked.

"Sure. I told him but he knows what it's all about."

"What's he going to do?"

"Nothing."

"They'll kill him."

"I guess they will."

"He must have got mixed up in something in Chicago." "I guess so," said Nick.

"It's a hell of a thing!"

"It's an awful thing," Nick said (Hemingway, 1988).

"I'm going to get out of this town," Nick said.

"Yes," said George. "That's a good thing to do."

"I can't stand to think about him waiting in the room and knowing he's going to get it. It's too damned awful."

"Well," said George, "you better not think about it (Hemingway, 1988).

In this case, this short story explains the internal and external conflicts that occur in humans, especially those related to feelings and the effects of one person's physical behavior to another. There are the feelings of each character that

are easy to understand even if it is only in the form of dialogues. The proof is Nick Addams who felt the worst feeling after meeting Ole Anderson, and made him frightened for his courage some time ago. The internal conflict of Nick is seen when George said he did not have to think about it anymore. Nick, who will run anyway, seemed to explain that he was fighting to save himself from a death that did not know when it would come after his actions today (Hemingway, 1988).

The external conflict printed out of this short story is of course when the two killers arrived. They made the atmosphere tighter because they controlled Nick and Sam while they then just left after waiting for a few hours. Indeed, that situation left behind confusion and fear by three other characters. The story is indeed full of both psychological effects and matter of physical abuse as crucial parts of interpersonal conflicts.

Interpersonal Conflicts and Its Continuation on Definitions and Meanings

Interpersonal conflict refers to the representation of incompatibility, disagreement, or difference between two or more interacting individuals (Brule & Eckstein, 2019; Rahim, 2010). The concepts are commonly difficult experiences for both individuals, and often the approaches made to resolve the conflict may be ineffective or perhaps make future conditions worse. In this conflict, people react as although there are completely different goals, there are not enough resources, and someone else is actually getting in the way of something that the beholder appreciates. Sometimes, this condition is believed to be true, but sorting out what is felt and what is personally accurate forms the basis of conflict analysis (Rahim, 2010; Wilmot & Hocker, 2017). A conflict happens when a person has difficulty in communication especially in different exact meaning of something. It could also result of widened verbal and non verbal misunderstandings as well.

In common understanding, any conflict is actually interpersonal although the feeling could be unequivocal and stated deeply in personal of individuals. It always relates to other person both openly and closely (Devito et al., 2015; Rahim, 2010). The definition of conflict is clear. It is identified when one person disagrees with another. The reason may vary according to own experience of another being. The meanings of the conflict could be derived from its definition, but also could be widened. Understandings of meanings of conflict is always subjective beyond any objectivity universalized by its definitions (Brule & Eckstein, 2019; Sharma & Singh, 2019).

Interpersonal conflict can be revealed in diverse ways. Some forms of communication during conflict may enhance resolution and the functioning of the relationship, whereas other forms may hinder resolution and worsen conditions for the individuals involved (Alzahrani, 2020; Sharma & Singh, 2019). Poor interpersonal communication skills can be very detrimental to the person if continuously ignored. Then it can cause things to not go well just because the interpersonal skills in communicating are not so good (Hussein & Al-Mamary, 2019; Jones, 2003; Rahim, 2010). The lack of necessary skill to express thoughts and ideas to others can lead to disturbances in understanding that can result in unwanted understanding, or quite poor misunderstandings in communicating. Furthermore, failure to understand the importance of good listening can result in the other person being confused in a conversation (Ahmer & Islam, 2020; Devito

et al., 2015). Consequently, in the end, the confusion may hinder success to a conversation. Ineffective interpersonal communication skills are a common problem found in societies and its significance is often ignored but remained as the main crucial aspect of all (Alzahrani, 2020; Hussein & Al-Mamary, 2019; Jones, 2003).

In further matter, interpersonal conflict is closely related to conflict of interest. It involves what some thinks of others and how his or her motivation may shape friction to others (Rahim & Katz, 2020). In this case, indeed matter of selfness is opposed with idea of otherness. Human judgment then is also indicated here since any conflict will not be interpersonal if someone is not valuing others from his or her own main view (Devito et al., 2015; Jones, 2003). Everytime people experience conflicts, most of their energy goes into emotions and strategizing concerned to those conflicts. They might feel the variety of negative emotions like fearful, anger, resentfulness, hopelessness, or even stressed. To resolves the conflicts, reducing the common stressor is needed by adding to one's repertoire so that the conflict is solved (Brule & Eckstein, 2019; Wilmot & Hocker, 2017). Even in some light cases, yielding to others' interests could be the real solution towards better understanding of otherness.

Indeed, conflict is inevitable. It can also be negative when it leads to violence, destroys communication links between all parties involved, discourages people from being cooperative, or hinders conflicting parties from solving problems. However, conflict can be creative and produce positive results by increasing communication, seek and focus on solving problems (Bao et al., 2016; Jones, 2003; Wang et al., 2023). Hence, communication and conflict are inevitably tied one another. The profound implications for the impact of that conflict shows how one communicates in a conflict situation. Communication may be used to worsen the conflict or to lead to its productive management (Ahmer & Islam, 2020; Wilmot & Hocker, 2017). Problems in interpersonal communication are inevitable as well. In presence of others, there will be someone who could not communicate clearly. Even by saying nothing, a person still makes statements and communicates non-verbally (Ahmer & Islam, 2020; Raimi & Jongman-Sereno, 2020). This idea is stated through cultural aspects of conflict in which any friction may come forward not because of hindered communication, but because of subjectivity of selfness towards otherness.

Communication and conflict are inseparable. How someone communicates in a conflict situation with other people has close and very deep implications for the impact of the conflict. Communication can be used to exacerbate a conflict or lead to positive management outcomes; resolution (Ahmer & Islam, 2020; Hussein & Al-Mamary, 2019; Wilmot & Hocker, 2017). The main idea of communication is not the message, but language. Therefore, understanding conflict means knowing more about language. Through widened meanings of language as cultural matter, humans live everyday meanings as they live in usual ways. Point of experience of conflict should accompanied with further idea of self-awareness (Hussein & Al-Mamary, 2019; Weixel-Dixon, 2017; Wilmot & Hocker, 2017). People should choose to resolve conflict in conscious condition before it could be realized. Once it is hoped, then further reciprocal intentions

could be gained to shape better resolution from both sides (Bao et al., 2016; Rahim & Katz, 2020; Wang et al., 2023).

The impact of conflict itself, as well as the way it is enacted, differs depending on the relational type (Raimi & Jongman-Sereno, 2020; Wilmot & Hocker, 2017). Conflict does not damage relationships, but poor resolution of conflict does. Interpersonal conflict resolution is a permanent solution to the problem or dispute through dialogue, without physical or verbal violence. There are several methods in life skills to effectively deal with interpersonal conflicts: treat others with respect, set the right tone for conversations, listen actively, and resolve conflicts when they are small (Bao et al., 2016; Wilmot & Hocker, 2017).

Nonetheless, once interpersonal conflict arises, one of certain things can happen. It will either come to a resolution or be left unresolved at all. Most of people may experience conflicts that never be resolved. While others may experience once the conflict subsided, other following conflict arises which make the conflict unresolved. Conflict is not always resolved as it could trigger another complexity to come forward (Raimi & Jongman-Sereno, 2020; Weixel-Dixon, 2017). There are times when the positions are too strong and independent to change that no agreement can be met. Research shows that different types and styles of conflict revolve around unresolved conflict. Avoiding, stonewalling, serial arguments, perpetual arguments, and intractable arguments all play a role in circumstances surrounding unresolved conflict (Rahim & Katz, 2020; Squires, 2012).

The Complexity of Interpersonal Conflicts and Its Impacts in *The Killers*

Interpersonal communication is interactions in which people connect to each other. They are also interdependent as one person's actions have consequences for others (Squires, 2012). Communication is considered successful if everyone in it understands the messages. However, in this short story, Hemingway leaves the ending of *The Killers* in wondering. No one knows where Al and Max came, their relations with Ole Anderson, and the ending story of the mysterious and foreign Ole.

Besides, interpersonal communication is the verbal and nonverbal interaction between two or more interdependent people. This relatively simple definition implies a variety of characteristics (Raimi & Jongman-Sereno, 2020; Squires, 2012). Each character in the short story has a unique way of communicating, and causes regret because of one of character actions resulting from communication between one character and another. At the next pages where the two killers, Al and Max, came and spoke so 'ordinary' in a tone full of sarcasm, they easily said that Nick and George were stupid people behind the nickname "bright boys" aimed at both of them. Here, a language in Al and Max's way of communication is difficult to interpret, and looks normal, but it is not. Likewise with Nick and George who did not feel it was sarcasm, only kept silent when they heard the nickname. The name indicates the two people's arrogance that could easily dominate Nick and George.

The aggressive language contained in Al and Max's conversation with George and Nick creates an impression that the communication will always be led by Al and Max themselves (Collinge-Germain, 2012). This is the beginning of

interpersonal conflict between each character in the story. Interpersonal communication exists along a continuum, ranging from relatively impersonal on the one hand to highly personal on the other (Raimi & Jongman-Sereno, 2020; Weixel-Dixon, 2017). On the end of the impersonal continuum can be simplified like a conversation between actual people do not know each other. When people who do not know each other communicate, there will always be unexpected conflicts in them.

When Nick asked some question about Al and Max, they chose to immediately cover Nick's mouth by saying something harsher like "none of your damn business" to show them that they had absolute power over intimidation. Indeed, it results to either Nick or George understood the situation by being silent and not asking a dangerous question (Collinge-Germain, 2012). The interpersonal conflict that is clearly printed here is when there is no definite answer for every question. When Al answered that he and Max wanted to kill Ole Anderson, that revealed their identity as the killers. When George asked again to make sure, what was the reason they both killed Ole Anderson, and Al answered with an answer that was so revealing of another question. He answered for friends, and George did not ask any more (Hemingway, 1988).

George followed Al and Max's orders because he himself knew that he could not do anything about it. He was threatened, as well as Nick and Sam who were held in the kitchen. George helped Al and Max, but not exactly at all. Because when Ole Anderson did not show up in that place, the two of them let go of George and the others, then left without a word (Hemingway, 1988). This conflict actually is only between Al, Max, and Ole. Nick, Sam, and George are unintended victims. This situation open to any meaning possible. If Ole came, they may kill Ole including three of them since they were witness of the murder. Interestingly, they did nothing to three of them (Collinge-Germain, 2012). They only did terror to frighten three of them though it will never make Ole to come that night.

Furthermore, when Nick comes to Ole Anderson's place to remind him that there are people who will kill him, Ole just said that he had given up, and did not want to run anymore. Then, when Nick asked why, Ole answered strangely. Ole's ambiguous explanation for the motive of the potential crime "*I got in wrong*" does not allow Nick or the reader to determine if Ole indeed deserves punishment or if he is simply the victim of circumstances (Collinge-Germain, 2012). However, Nick sets out to help Ole Anderson, breaks an unspoken promise he made with two killers, and gets misunderstood because he is expecting something, but the result is out of any common sense.

Every character in this story gets involved in interpersonal conflict between Al, Max, and Ole. They get confused about what is really going on. Two people came suddenly, held them in the kitchen, and then left away when they could not meet Ole at that night. Nick, George or Sam are not close with Ole, but they have sympathy for him. They understand nothing but underlying message that Ole needs help. The courage of Nick represented their sympathy's transformation towards empathy and then to action. Only Nick who was so brave to tell Ole and later he was appreciated by other two. *The Killers* clearly reflected that a conflict

can involve one person to another and have an impact on everyone who even just happens to be there.

D. CONCLUSION

The problems such as interpersonal conflict are unavoidable and may cause various negative effects if they do not find a solution. In *The Killers*, interpersonal conflict that occurs to one character can influence other characters to get involved in the conflict. Interpersonal conflict will always occur in humans in every communication that someone faces. In dealing with interpersonal conflict, it is directed to be more careful in listening to other people, then read the situation correctly, and if a conflict has already occurred, then resolve the conflict when it is still a small problem. However, the story speaks that sometimes conflict remains unsolved as Ole refused Nick's information. No one could do anything besides Ole himself, yet he surrendered and does nothing for his future.

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