

Greetings Faculty Mediators,

As the semester comes to a close and we head into the summer, I would like to offer one last abstract before my time as GA for FDR ends. Yes, it is a bit long, but I was so impressed with this article, co-authored by one of UNM and FDR's own, that I felt it worthy of sharing. In addition to the implications for conflict resolution, I was flabbergasted at how it also fit in with my own thesis work on the construction of reality in a completely different field. I imagine many of you may observe similar connections to your own work. At the very least it offers much food for thought.

Thanks to each of you who made my time here so rewarding and enjoyable. Thank you for sharing your own unique wisdom and encouragement over the past two years.

It has been a wonderful adventure, and I leave here knowing I was part of something truly important.

Cheers,
Kate Enright

Abstract: Jones, W., and Hughes, S. H. (2003). Complexity, conflict resolution, and how the mind works. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 4, summer.

Opening with the sweeping statement that the “next two decades will present challenges to Western thought unseen in almost four hundred years,” the authors compare revolutionary changes in thought and belief that occurred as part of post-Enlightenment progress with current work in fields as diverse as neuroscience, physics, linguistics, microbiology, and psychology; challenging conventional assumptions about the very nature of reality that grew out of the scientific and industrial revolutions notably the principles of objectivism, reductionism, determinism and linearity. How you might ask does this relate to mediation? Discoveries in the last two decades have had profound implications on our understanding of how humans create their reality from sensory experiences, and in turn how we view human interaction and conflict.

A broad overview of recent developments directs us to consider the role of complex adaptive systems. Whether a community, an ecosystem, or the human brain, complex adaptive systems represent a whole new area of exploration that is impossible to understand or explain with traditional analysis. That the human brain is in fact the most complex system in the world is no surprise to mediators, nor is the argument that communication about abstract concepts is a mostly metaphorical process. To support their statement that we are entering a new age of change the authors explain why linear reductionist analysis cannot explain complex adaptive processes. The notion that mediators can be objective and neutral is questioned and the authors argue that these are standards we cannot emulate because they create a view of reality that does not exist until we as mediators and disputants co-form it. By embracing our place as mediators as feeling beings with thoughts we can then constructively engage in the process actively. More controversial was the question left to readers as to whether we as mediators have a duty to balance power in order to create a level playing field. They ask us to step back and rethink many of our closely held assumptions about the nature of conflict and human reality.

Acknowledging that they have attempted to bring to light profound changes in the way we think about the human mind and complex adaptive systems, Jones and Hughes pivotal article is one that all mediators should be acquainted with if only because it expands our awareness of an ever changing field, and offers real possibilities for where we may be headed in the future.