Miki Kashtan and Inbal Kashtan's Additional NVC Key Differentiations

When Stephanie Bachman Mattei and Kristin Collier began working on their book *The Heart of Nonviolent Communication: 25 Keys to Shift from Separation to Connection* (which is scheduled to be published by PuddleDancer Press in September 2022) Stephanie asked for my support. I ended up offering substantial feedback on the book, chapter by chapter, and, also, writing a foreword for the book. I invited them to expand the range of the NVC Key Differentiations that they would cover in the book to include, also, the fourteen additional ones that Inbal and I collected over the years. In the end, this was quite beyond the scope of the massive project they took on. Instead, the additional ones are mentioned in the book and this document is the shortest version possible of explaining our thinking behind coming up with these additional distinctions in support of integrating NVC principles and practices.

The concept of key differentiation and an original list was created by Marshall Rosenberg as a way to succinctly capture developmental shifts that accompany the integration of NVC into one’s inner consciousness. Most of his original list is lost to us, and what remains is very different from the current list used in CNVC Certification, which is available in the CNVC Certification Preparation Packet, downloadable in a few languages on [https://www.cnvc.org/certification/process](https://www.cnvc.org/certification/process).

Key differentiations have two primary uses:

- Supporting people who are on the path of learning and integrating NVC in making sense of their own understanding of their journey and where they are within it. (see also [https://www.cnvc.org/pathways-liberation-self-assessment-matrix-discussion-page/](https://www.cnvc.org/pathways-liberation-self-assessment-matrix-discussion-page/))
- Supporting people who share NVC with others in offering information in a concise manner in support of understanding and integration for learners.

Below is the list of those we added, starting with #26, as there are twenty-five in the list that CNVC uses for purposes of certification. I am writing “we” rather than “I” even though I cannot confirm these with Inbal, because they were all born of many conversations and I have full confidence that this is our thinking, not just my own.

26. Attending to needs with care, or meeting needs

As we reflected on the frequency with which we heard people speak of “a world in which everyone’s needs are met,” we eventually saw that we can always attend to needs with care, even when specific strategies for meeting them are not present. We were supported in this insight by conversations with Yannai, Inbal’s (and Kathy Simon’s) son, who, at six, knew to say which needs of his were met what percentage of the time, and that his need to know that his needs matter was met 100% of the time.

27. Understanding, or agreement

In the patriarchal societies in which most of humanity lives now, we are habituated to having a sense of connection through being in agreement with each other. This, to Inbal and me, is
embedded within the either/or paradigm. Shifting from agreement to understanding makes it possible for us to transform conflicts into dilemmas that we hold together. This distinction is foundational to attending to our core global crises, as understanding each other is a precondition for being able to work out solutions that work for all of us.

28. Self-care, or selfishness

In the either/or framework of scarcity within which we live, attending to our needs is generally seen as being selfish, held in opposition to caring for others. Within the approach that NVC rests on, caring for ourselves isn’t at odds with caring for others, and the term “selfish” loses meaning altogether. Rather than being at odds, self-care and care for others are mutually supportive: when we care for ourselves we resource ourselves to care for others; when we care for others freely, we are attending to our own needs, be they contribution, meaning, generosity, or interdependence in action.

29. Holding everyone’s needs with care, or altruism (or selflessness)

The terms altruism or selflessness, while being seen as positive qualities, are still rooted within the same either/or view that maintains that we can only care for others by not caring about ourselves. Instead, the perspective of holding everyone’s needs with care includes the very person who is choosing to approach life in this way, dissolving the either/or and removing the apparent need for sacrifice.

30. Self-compassion, or abdicating responsibility

When we have taken action that has unwanted impacts on others, patriarchal societies train us to see ourselves as guilty, often leading to punitive measures towards self, ranging from harsh self-judgments to full blown self-loathing. Within this approach, tenderness and compassion towards ourselves are seen as interfering with taking responsibility. Self-judgments are seen as the only strategy to effectively take responsibility for our “mistakes” and therefore shift behavior. The needs-based approach of NVC rests on self-compassion as a deep pathway towards taking responsibility without harshness: when we have full compassion for the needs that led to any action that resulted in unwanted impacts, we are more likely to find ways of attending to such needs that are not at cost to others.

31. Self-responsibility and self-reliance, or self-sufficiency

Modern capitalist societies socialize us to believe in self-sufficiency, which generally is seen to mean that we only lean on our own resources to attend to our needs. Within the perspective of interdependence that NVC emerges from, we acknowledge and recognize that without other people to attend to our needs, we cannot sustain our human lives. That said, it is still our own responsibility to take the initiative to own our needs and make all the requests necessary to attend to them. That is what self-responsibility is. We also then make some of these requests of ourselves, which means we can rely on ourselves to mobilize our resources in full empowerment (self-reliance) instead of only leaning on others to attend to our needs.

32. Inner safety, or safety dependent on others

We are often habituated to see our sense of safety as dependent on what others do or don’t do, especially equating safety with others accepting what we say or do without challenge or criticism.
Inner safety is a pathway that recognizes that it is not within our human capacity to control what others do or don’t do. Instead, we learn to see that our liberation and wholeness emerge from being able to experience inner safety based on our own warm, solid, loving relationship to ourselves as well as to seek support where we need it and can have it. Instead of protecting ourselves from what others do, we learn that we can survive it with a tender relationship to self and, over time, also to others.

33. Responsibility to, or responsibility for

This KD is an original from Marshall Rosenberg that isn’t included in the CNVC list though we both heard it from Marshall many times.

In listening to Marshall over the years, Inbal and I understood him to point to a subtle and deep shift from holding ourselves as responsible for others’ feelings to holding the responsibility to act in full alignment with our own needs and values. Sometimes, this means taking ownership of and expressing regret for impacts when we have not acted in line with our needs and values. Sometimes, however, it may well mean accepting with sorrow that acting with integrity may lead to uncomfortable impacts that are still in line with our needs and values.

34. Applying NVC, or teaching NVC

When people learn NVC and are excited about it, very often Inbal and I saw them want to immediately turn around and teach NVC to others. Instead, we saw, often, that people jump over the formative experience that all of us can have of bringing our NVC skills to whatever work we do in the world. When we do that, we contribute to change through mediation, facilitation, supporting decision-making, and all the other ways we can support individuals and groups around us by using our NVC skills. We also then bring a needs awareness everywhere we are, contributing in minute ways to transformation. In our experience, more often than not, dramatic shifts happen when we apply what we know without actively teaching people anything. Similar changes often take years for people to experience on their own by learning NVC.

35. Offering feedback, or wanting to be heard for a trigger

When someone’s actions are not aligned with our own wishes or needs, a world of difference exists between what we usually do and what it means to offer someone feedback in support of learning and collective capacity. Often enough, what we are doing is implicitly asking the other person to hear us, which means the focus is on us receiving something rather than on offering the other person something that would support them and the relationship or purpose we are serving.

36. Radical change, or peripheral change

This KD is an original from Marshall Rosenberg that isn’t included in the CNVC list though we both heard it from Marshall many times.

In listening to Marshall over the years, Inbal and I understood him to point to the difference between changing a particular decision (peripheral change) and changing how decisions are made (radical change). He urged all of us who wanted to be engaging in social change to focus more on radical change than on peripheral change, so that our efforts would sustain themselves over time.
As a side note, other thinkers see a two-dimensional map, with one axis being core to peripheral and the other axis being radical to incremental.

37. Entrustment, or submission

Marshall spoke often about not letting anyone make us submit or rebel. As Inbal and I evolved our own thinking about the alternatives, we saw that they often remain invisible, and we decided to spell them out. In our own work, we saw over time the emerging clarity that entrustment is a rarely articulated alternative to submission: it’s an experience of fully trusting someone’s leadership and going along with what they are doing or asking for because we trust that their intuition, wisdom, and experience are likely to attend to needs, even if in the moment we don’t see how. We no longer need to have the full picture by evaluating the situation independently for ourselves before leaning on trust to take the next step.

38. Conscious choice, or rebellion

Just as much as we lack alternatives to submission, we also lack alternatives to rebellion. In large part, this is because rebellion *feels* like choice. Our conditioning leads us to think that rebellion and freedom are one and the same. It takes a lot of *inner* freedom to recognize that rebellion still leaves us within the terms of that to which we are rebelling. Instead, we can reach a level of discernment that makes it possible to say “yes” or “no” from within deep clarity about needs rather than as a reaction to someone’s authority.

39. Conscious response, or reaction

I chose to put this one at the end of this list of additional KDs because I think of it as a pivotal milestone on the path of liberation that NVC spells out. In the absence of a conscious commitment to nonviolence, we are likely to react to what happens around us from within a fight-flight-freeze state. Embracing NVC and practicing nonviolence over time generate growing capacity for inner freedom. From within this experience of freedom we then can respond consciously based on awareness of needs, our own and others’.