THE FIELD BEYOND WRONGDOING AND RIGHTDOING: A STUDY OF

ARAB-JEWISH GRASSROOTS DIALOGUE GROUPS IN THE UNITED

STATES

by

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contained therein.

Out Beyond Ideas

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,

there is a field. I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass,

the world is too full to talk about.

Ideas, language, even the phrase *each other*

doesn't make any sense.

Jalal al-Din Rumi

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Preface

Since personal storytelling is so central to this thesis, I will begin by telling the story of how I encountered Arab-Jewish dialogue and how it impacted me. In 2001 when I moved to Cleveland from Tel Aviv and learned that Cleveland was home to one of the largest Arab-American communities in the US it occurred to me that here was a chance to meet and get to know Palestinians. The irony of this thought is that I was raised in Netanya, Israel which is only about 15 km (9 miles) from the West Bank. Despite this proximity, I never knew any Arabs while growing up. This disconnect is typical of Israelis and Palestinians even in mixed cities like Haifa and Jerusalem. So, upon arriving in Cleveland, I launched an Arab-Jewish dialogue group, which convened on Case campus once every two weeks for almost a year.

When I initiated the idea for the dialogue group, my original goal was to use the group as a platform to influence others to a more politically liberal "peace-camp" viewpoint like my own. The hubris of that thought now embarrasses me. Because I fancied myself already liberal and tolerant, I didn't expect to undergo any personal changes. But I did.

Instead of "teaching" others as I had originally intended, I myself experienced a shift. I had originally been subject to a dichotomous world view of "us" and "them." But within the crucible of the dialogue-encounter group I found that my way of thinking expanded. The group itself took on a life of its own and within it my own identity shifted to encompass a more inclusive "we." I was no longer just an Israeli-American living in Cleveland; my identity became a

member of the group itself. And the profound I-Thou discussions became a

touch-point on how I wanted to conduct my life.

This experience ignited in me a passion to study and facilitate and participate

in such groups. I wanted to learn more about the enlightening transformation

that I had undergone, to discover if others had experienced the same thing

and if so, how to reach out and replicate the experience still further. Thus, this

dissertation was begun.

The Field Beyond Wrongdoing and Rightdoing: A Study of Arab-Jewish

Grassroots Dialogue Groups in the United States

Abstract

by

NURETE L. BRENNER

This study examines the influence of US Arab-Jewish dialogue encounter groups on shifts in the attitudes of members. Four literature streams inform the study: the contact hypothesis, social identity theory, the literature on dialogue and conversational learning and the literature on the phenomenon of attitude shift. Using a combination of comparative case study and phenomenological methodologies, three separate sustained Arab-Jewish dialogue groups meeting in the US for at least a year were observed and 28 individual one-on-one interviews with Arab and Jewish members of six different groups were conducted. The research goals were to obtain a richly-descriptive picture of the context and conversation in the three groups, and to apply phenomenological analysis of the interviews to identify examples of individual shifts or transformation.

Findings from the research showed that the dimensions of dialogue were present in two out of the three groups. In the two groups where dialogue occurred, 72% of the participants reported a shift in attitude. In the third group just 25% of participants reported a shift in attitude. The dimensions of dialogue identified in the literature: active listening; suspension of assumptions; establishing psychological safety; expansion (or embracing ambiguity) and finding shared meaning through cognitive and affective dynamics. As a result of this study two other dimensions of dialogue were identified: personal storytelling and the importance of affect as well as cognition in finding shared meaning. Thus the definition of dialogue expands to include emotional as well as cognitive meaning-making.

Implications for practice point to the importance of setting guidelines and establishing effective leadership and facilitation to allow members to share personal stories. This soon leads to a sense of trust and psychological safety in the group which permits the expression of affect and the building of relationships thus creating the space for shift to happen.

Part I: Research

Chapter 1: Statement of Problem

This is a study of three separate sustained Arab-Jewish dialogue encounter groups that have been meeting in the United States for at least a year. My goal has been twofold: first, to obtain a richly-descriptive picture of these three groups as comparative case studies. In so doing, I am seeking to understand the effects of the dialogue encounter on its participants, the processes and dynamic of the interactions within the encounter as well as the possibility of transforming relationships within the context of the dialogue group. Second, my goal as been to apply phenomenological methods to gain a clear example of a dialogue encounter group experience that many have described as a "shift" or transformation. This phenomenon has been understudied in the realm of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, but those who discuss it in other conflicts define *shift* as "a positive, qualitative change in the relationship between conflict parties, including changed attitudes toward oneself and the other party, the conflict issues, and the conflict situation as a whole. Shift includes cognitive change (e.g., perceptions, attributions) and affective change (e.g., feelings, evaluations) within and between the individuals and groups involved in conflict." (Carstarphen, 2002). By employing these two methods side by side I hope to present the internal landscape of the dialogue encounter group and its role in conciliating conflict and to theorize as to how such a transformative experience can be generalized. Ultimately, I anticipate that my research will contribute to our

practical knowledge and theoretical understanding of conflict resolution in intractable, identity-based ethno-political conflicts.

It is a fundamental irony of our age that at the same time the forces of globalization are shrinking the world into a hamlet, polarization continues, cultures clash and conflicts abound. The question of whether contact brings people closer together or pushes them farther apart is more perplexing and more urgent than ever before.

This is a study about the effects of contact on conflict. Its purpose is not to reprise the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, nor to relate the story of the Jewish people returning to its homeland or the Palestinian people's yearning for self actualization. Rather, it is a study about the possibility of transforming an adversary into an ally by a process of listening and talking, understanding and empathy, gaining trust and extending trust. It is a study that is searching for a method to dismantle the terrorist's impulse and a blueprint to build a house of peace to shelter all those touched by the Middle East conflict. It will tell the story of individuals working together in dialogue encounter groups and undergoing profound personal change and will speculate on how the story of that small change can be translated into a grander scale:

> *"The capacity to cause change grows in an individual over time as*
>
> *small-scale efforts lead gradually to larger ones. But the process needs*

a beginning – a story, an example, an early taste of success –

something along the way that helps a person form the belief that it is

possible to make the world a better place. Those who act on that belief

spread it to others. They are highly contagious. Their stories must be

told.” *(Bornstein, 2004, p. 282)*

The stories I relate here are those told to me by Arab and Jewish dialogue group participants throughout the United States. According to the Center for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking at the University of Minnesota, which has compiled a directory of Arab-Jewish dialogue groups in the United States, there "are scores of Arab/Palestinian dialogue groups operating in the U.S., some for as long as 20 years… in an attempt to engage the public in activities that would foster mutual understanding and co-existence in anticipation of a peace agreement."

"Scores" is a best estimate because the nature of these groups makes it difficult to count – they coalesce and disintegrate; they form and they fragment; they come together and fall apart. In the three or more years that I have been interested in and researching these living room dialogue groups in the US, I have been in contact with about six or seven different groups but have heard of "scores" more. An educated guess would put the number of such groups over 100 in operation at any one time and more that start and end due to internal conflict and - sometimes - external conflict.

The Center for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking on their website goes on to say, as follows:

> *After the breakdown of Oslo and the start of the second Intifada, many groups disbanded in Israel/Palestine because of logistical challenges, distrust, and concerns of "collaborating" with the enemy. At the same time, many dialogue groups were initiated in the U.S., motivated by people who wanted to understand the other reality and who, in the words of one dialogue group, "refuse to be enemies." The same motivations played a role in renewed efforts after the events of 9/11.*

(See Appendix 1 for more information from the Center.)

- I began my study asking the following questions: what happens in these dialogue groups? **Are relations between the Arabs and Jews in the dialogue groups improved by contact? How do the intergroup dynamics play out in the dialogue group and how might those dynamics be conducted in order to affect a positive outcome for the group? What happens in these groups when true dialogue takes place and what happens when dialogue does not occur? And finally, do the people change – or "shift" - as a result of the encounter in the dialogue group and what is the nature of the shift? How can the effectiveness of group dialogue in social conflict be enhanced?**

The word "dialogue" in itself is steeped in controversy as the Palestinians often associate dialogue with capitulation and acceptance of the status quo, while for so many Jews it is a way to challenge that status quo. In Neveh Shalom/Wahat al Salam / Oasis for Peace, an experimental Jewish-Arab village established in Israel in 1972 today with forty resident families half of whom are Arab and half Jewish, they discovered that "cordial contact, as contact ("eating humous together") may provide a good feeling for the moment, but solves nothing; rather it helps preserve the status quo and even fortifies it." (Halabi, 2000, p. 12).

Thus, if casual contact in the best case scenarios preserves the status quo and in worst case scenarios extends the conflict, is there an alternative? Is there a way of transforming debate into dialogue, conflict into coexistence and foes to friends? These are the questions that I started out with.

Asking the questions has turned out to be the easy part. An elucidation of the difficulty of the subject comes from Ethan Bronner, Pulitzer Prize winning reporter and Jerusalem bureau chief for The New York Times who wrote in January, 2009: "the two sides speak in two distinct tongues… the very words they use mean opposite things to each other." For example, take the word "Zionism." For many Israeli Jews, as Bronner points out "there is almost no higher value than Zionism. The word is bathed in a celestial glow, suggesting selflessness and nobility." But for Arabs, the word Zionism is associated with

"theft, oppression, racist exclusionism." Another example is the barrier that runs "across and inside the West Bank." To Palestinians, this barrier is a wall; to the Israelis it is a security fence (Bronner, 2009).

As Bronner (2009) goes on to say:

> No place, date or event in this conflicted land is spoken of in a common language…The holiest site in Jerusalem is the Temple Mount to Jews, the Noble Sanctuary to Muslims. The 1948 conflict that created Israel is one side's War of Independence, the Catastrophe for the other. ……Even though an understanding crystallized a decade ago over the outline of an eventual solution here — Israel returning essentially to its 1967 borders and a Palestinian state forming in the West Bank and Gaza — the two sides' narratives have actually hardened since attempts to reach a peace foundered.

> ..[T]he competing war narratives are part of a larger narrative disconnect. One side says that after thousands of years of oppression, the Jewish nation has returned to its rightful home. It came in peace and offered its hand to its neighbors numerous times only to be met with a sword. Opposition to Israel, this side argues, stems from Muslim intolerance, nationalist fervor and rank anti-Semitism, all fed by envy at the young state's success… ….The other side tells a different story: There is no Jewish nation, only followers of a religion. A group of European colonialists came here, stole and pillaged, throwing

hundreds of thousands off their land and destroying their villages and

homes. A country born in sin, Israel has built up an aggressive military

with help from Washington in the grips of a powerful Jewish lobby.

(Bronner, 2009)

If there is no common consensus on language, in what medium is it possible to negotiate this conflict, to mediate the hurt and to surmount the barriers to peace, to coexistence?

The public dialogue on the Internet mirrors the disconnect and competing narratives often found when people meet in dialogue groups. Though those engaged believe they are holding a useful conversation in fact each side is really only attempting to pursuade the other without really hearing, without listening. An example here is taken from a response on Facebook to an article chiding President Obama for speaking directly to Arabs in his Cairo speech (delivered on June 4, 2009) and not to Israel.

The following Facebook exchange demonstrates the frustrations and complexities of a discussion about the Middle East conflict: (names have been changed for confidentiality):

Ben: Interesting. I keep wondering why Obama is pressuring the Israelis into concessions? It seems that the more concessions Israel gives the Arabs, the worse things get b/c the Arabs never seem to hold up their end of the deal. The concession given to the PA under the Oslo Accords and Israel's withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 seem to encourage more terrorism and more demands from the Arabs. I believe this

is overlooked because, if any demands were made by Obama to the Arabs, they would simply be ignored. They have not renounced terror and they have not recognized Israel's right to exist. So the only thing that Obama can do is ask Israel to make concessions – concessions which are counterproductive.

Renee: concessions? who has ALL of the control of this entire land Israel and Palestine...even palestine is covered in Israeli checkpoints? who is occupying another people? to me it doesnt seem like so many concessions have been given to the normal every day Palestinian, it is the moderate are suffering. And the pullout from Gaza was not bi-lateral, how did that strengthen relations between the Palestinians and Israel??? And who has not renounced terrorism? Hamas or the average Palestinian??? There are plenty of Palestinians who recognize Israel's right to exist, and even more would do so if they weren't treated like animals.

Yael: Renee, Israelis know that it's not all about them - it's about both sides. The problem is that Israel has given, with nothing in return. Israel withdrew all of the settlers, soldiers and uprooted graves from Gaza and got nothing in return but rockets. Yes, the Palestinian people are suffering, but it's not because of Israel's refusal to give them freedom – it's because of Hamas. When Israel left Gaza, Hamas had the power to turn the former settlements into homes for the Palestinians, but those houses are barely used. Why did they shoot rockets into Southern Israel after the withdrawal from Gaza? There's no justification for that. (Facebook, October, 2009)

The above exchange is not dialogue. Each side is entrenched in its position, barricaded behind its own borders. The two sides could continue indefinitely

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never really meeting, expressing opinions but never really having an authentic

encounter: Can the two sides move beyond this type of barren and futile

discourse? Is it possible to do it differently?

The dialogue group members I have met and have interviewed have shown

me that at times it is possible to do it differently. There are examples of

dialogue groups that have moved beyond the ping-pong of opinions.

However, even these groups have to navigate emotional mine fields.

Below, is a letter written in the beginning of January, 2009 during the war in

Gaza from a Jewish cousin who lives in the western Galilee in Israel and

engages in dialogue with Arab neighbors living also in that area:

To my friends and any who are still reading about reactions to our war in Gaza,

This past week I was involved with organizing a meeting of Jews and Arabs in our part of the western Galil. We are a group of unrelated Jews in our area of the western Galil with an Arab artists group based in the town of Kfar Yasif, 20 minute drive from Gesher Haziv. We are attempting to initiate programs which reach out to larger sectors of our communities in the hope of creating greater understanding between Arabs and Jews in the Galil.

Our previous meeting had been over a month ago. Meanwhile, 1200 bodies were being buried in Gaza. Last week's gathering had to be called off because most of the Arab participants said they would not come as a result of the war. Instead we called for a small gathering of our steering group. We met in the community center of Kfar Yasif, 8 of us, Arabs and Jews, to discuss how we can overcome the events of the moment and continue our efforts. One of the Arab participants was a young artist who came to the meeting in order to represent many who were against coming. When he was born his father was hoping for peace and serenity with his relatively new Jewish neighbors in the Galil and therefore named him Saalem.

Saalem spoke at this meeting, and I am trying here to bring you a transcription of what he said. True, I and others weren't ready to accept all his

conclusions, and we had things to say to him as well. But it is also so important for us to hear him out and understand its implications. The results of Gaza are not only in our ability to earn a period of no rockets in the south, and not only about the repercussions in the world media. The results also affect our neighbors who are Arab Israeli citizens.

Here is my attempt at transcribing what Saalem said:

"At this moment in time I have no desire to meet with you and your Jewish friends. Your people have just killed so many men, women and children who are my Palestinian Arab brethren. I and my friends are still licking our wounds and our anger and our despair. I have come here this evening unwillingly, only to tell you these things so that you are not left with the illusion that there is now still an ability for joint communication and dialogue between us.

You Jews come here for dialogue in order to create a semblance of co-existence between us. I'm not looking to make friends. I'm looking for equality. I'm looking for you to know that this land is my land, my father's and my grandfather's and his grandfather's. You have made me a low-class citizen in my land, the land you took from me.

Though I know I cannot roll-back history, I am angered at your not recognizing my history. In school and on my own I've studied your history and your suffering over the centuries. I visited the remains of the concentration camps in Europe. I've studied your Bible and your literature. But you….you turn your faces away and remain unaware of our Nakba, our disaster, as our land was torn away from us. You live in towns and villages that sit upon the ruins of our villages, and are unaware. Your schools don't teach our history. You resent any mention of what we have lost. You resent any mention of our rights to our land.

In your eyes we are sub-human. 13 Israeli Arabs were shot and killed by the police during the demonstrations of October 2000. True, the demonstrations were not quiet ones. They were a result of pent-up anger and frustration at our treatment as sub-citizens in our own land. Violent demonstrations by criminal settlers in the West-Bank have never been treated by killing of Jews. But when we demonstrated, you shot and killed 13 of us. It is with that same regard to our sub-status that you saw no wrong in killing so many hundreds of innocent men, women and children in the war against the Hamas in Gaza. You would not have done the same if there were Jews living in the homes which you bombed and destroyed.

I am an artist, and together with other artists in our group I'll continue having joint art exhibits here in our town with other Jewish artists. But I and most of

my friends in this group cannot supply your need to show how we can co-exist while we moan for the loss of so many lives and continue to be a sub-status in our own land."

That's it. His words were much more compelling than I could transcribe from memory, but I thought you may be interested in reading this. Our dialogue with Saalem was much longer and I think we still have common ground for joint work with Saalem and his friends, but both we and he have an uphill struggle which has now been made more difficult and complicated.

With a deep (but troubled) hope for the future,

Aaron

The above letter is testament both to the difficulty of Arab-Jewish dialogue but also to its endurance. Much of the research on Arab/Jewish or Palestinian/Israeli dialogue encounter groups is being conducted in Israel itself (Abu Nimer 1999, Maoz 2000, Maoz, et al, 2004, Mollov and Lavie, 2001, Stephan et al, 2004, Bar-On and Kassem, 2004, Bargal, 2004, Suleiman, 2004, etc.) and, intuitively, this makes sense. However, in such an intertwined world, geographical distance loses much of its significance. The active Diasporas of both groups "maintain their ethno-national identities and… preserve regular contacts with their homelands… They create elaborate networks that permit and encourage exchanges of money, political support and cultural influence with their homelands and other segments of the diaspora whenever these exist." (Sheffer, 1997).

Furthermore, from a researcher's perspective, there are some distinct advantages in studying such groups in the United States. Some of the obstacles to be found in the Middle East are instantly neutralized, while others

are lessened or mitigated. The first such example to come to mind is geographic access. For Israelis, traveling to the West Bank or to Gaza can be dangerous and life threatening; whereas for Palestinians, crossing checkpoints can be harrowing and obtaining travel papers to come to Israel can be next to impossible. Thus, the possibility of face to face dialogue is severely limited in the region. Clearly, in the US, such obstacles do not apply. Not only is it easier to meet physically, but finding a space of psychological safety for the group is more readily available and thus the dialogue itself takes on a different character or texture.

Other researchers support such an assertion. According to Amy Hubbard (1997) who studied one dialogue encounter group in the US: "In fact, their distance from the conflict both geographically and emotionally was a quality which some members believed brought them closer to one another…[it] emphasized their American-ness…" (p. 269). In short, the clear advantage to conducting dialogue away from the region is that dialogue can be sustained despite the events that occur in the region that might close off all access to each other.

An additional issue which is a greater obstacle in Palestine/Israel is the issue of power asymmetry. The Israeli participants demonstrate the confidence inherent in being of the majority while the Palestinians reveal the inherent lack of confidence of a minority (Saunders, 1999; Maoz 2000). According to one facilitator of dialogue encounters: "Israelis had to be wary of patronizing or

appearing to be patronizing, while Palestinians were wary of assuming the role of victim" (Saunders, 1999, p. 206).

Language, too, causes power asymmetry because the dialogue encounters in Israel are mainly conducted in Hebrew (not the first language of the Palestinian participants) or in English (not the first language of either side, but usually more difficult for the Palestinians participants (Saunders, 1999). Due to the power asymmetry issues, many of the studies I have read around these groups in Israel focus a great deal of attention on these issues (Maoz, 2000). Here, in the US, some of these issues are neutralized, although one must be aware that power asymmetry still exists here. Since many of the Jewish participants have been in the US for several generations and have firmly established themselves here while a great many Arab and Palestinian participants are more recent immigrants, conditions of power asymmetry are still present.

Other differences between Israeli based and US based dialogue encounter groups exist. For example, many of the groups are institutional in Israel, which means that they are receiving funding from Jewish organizations in the US or Europe, while in the States, they tend to be grassroots, i.e. not sponsored by anyone except by the people involved. Most of the dialogue encounter groups in Israel tend to be short term, which has been criticized by researchers. "The continuity of new attitudes and energies gained by

participants during encounters are often undermined by the short duration of the programs, which last a few days or a single weekend…("we send people home more confused…" Bar and Bargal 1995). The encounter's effect is found to be lost or forgotten within a few months, prompting encounter program participants to return to their previous negative or stereotypical attitudes…"(Abu Nimer, 2004). The groups I have contact with and intend to research in the US have been ongoing for at least a year (one such group has been meeting for 18 years).

Finally, though, as justification for my study:

> *Encounter and coexistence programs constitute one of the few channels for the development of communication, trust and genuine understanding of the complex Arab-Jewish reality in Israel. Thus, it is essential that these encounters be examined and professionally developed to respond to the needs of the two communities …The interethnic encounter remains the primary tool for coexistence and dialogue….such functions make the constant evaluation and reevaluation of the work produced by encounter and coexistence programs imperative." (Abu-Nimer, 2004, p. 406)*

To reflect this more hopeful view of the importance of dialogue in conflict, I quote here one of my Jewish dialogue group interviewees from East Town who expresses the following:

I'm reading the book Abraham by Bruce Feiler and I had no idea that the two religions were so similar…I'm realizing the closeness of the two traditions. I

never got that before. Many of our prophets are their prophets… we believe as Jews that it was Isaac that Abraham almost sacrificed; they believe it was Ishmael. ..And the book talks a little bit about culture, too, so the things that are important to Jews are important to them, and I realized two things. If you're going to fight with somebody, you're going to fight with your family the hardest. I mean, look at your life. Don't they inflict the deepest cut? And we are family.

You know, I like to point out that Hagar was sent away with Ishmael, and in our tradition, I think it actually says that Ishmael tried to kill Isaac. But, the thing I like to point out is not that, but that the two brothers reconciled at the burial of their father and lived the rest of their lives in peace. I take great solace from that because I believe in my heart as much as this sounds - particularly today - impossible, that peace is achievable. I really believe it. It just takes so darn long.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There are many ways to approach the research for a study of interethnic dialogue groups in an identity-based conflict, but several streams of literature stand out as being particularly relevant: the literature on dialogue and conversation, group dynamics, the Contact Hypothesis, Social Identity Theory, and the literature on transformational attitude change, specifically focusing on the phenomenon of shift. In my study I hope to weave these disparate strands together to form an analytic framework in which to situate my work.

Dialogue and Conversation

What is dialogue? It is a word used so frequently in many different contexts that its meaning elides and slips out of grasp. A quick search on the New York Times website (November 20, 2009) brings up the word three times: "In Beijing, Obama Calls for 'Strong Dialogue'"; La Danse: The Paris Opera Ballet (2009):Creating Dialogue from Body Language; Michael Haneke in Dialogue with Darren Aronofsky on casting children in his new movie. How can one define a word that is used in so many different contexts?

One useful way to begin, perhaps, is by explaining what it isn't. Dialogue is not the same as discussion, debate and conversation though it is often used as a synonym for those concepts. In a discussion, the usual mode of attention is to listen with the intent to react, to wait for one's moment and then offer one's own thoughts in a kind of beauty contest of ideas paraded side by side each "in its bathing suit and high heels seeking your admiration. When

it's off the runway I go to the dressing room and get ready for my next appearance while you're parading your idea. Of course, I'm not paying any attention to yours." (Michael Kahn, 1974 and 1981). In a debate, the intent is not even to listen to one another but to have – again in Michael Kahn's (1981) words - a "Free-For-All:" In a free-for-all "[t]here is a prize out there in the middle of the floor….and the goal is to win it and anything goes -- elbows, knees, gouging, anything. You win by looking not just smart, but by looking smarter. And that means it's just as important to make them look dumb as to make you look smart." Many times participants use the word dialogue, but really mean either discussion or debate.

MIT scholar, Peter Senge (1990), is very clear on the balance of dialogue and discussion. He asserts that "discussion is the necessary counterpart of dialogue." In his view, dialogue is not superior to discussion as both are necessary for different aims. He goes on to say that whereas in a "discussion different views are presented and defended…[to] provide a useful analysis of the whole situation. In dialogue, different views are presented as a means toward discovering a new view. In a discussion, decisions are made. In a dialogue, complex issues are explored." Each type of discourse has its place, its uses and its significance: "when they are productive, discussions converge on a conclusion or course of action. On the other hand, dialogues are diverging; they do not seek agreement, but a richer grasp of complex issues…" The importance of dialogue as diverging rather than converging will be explored further in later chapters of this dissertation.

The relationship of dialogue to conversation is complex. It can be said that conversation is the overarching umbrella term under which may be included normative forms such as dialogue, social chit-chat, argument, an exchange of information or ideas etc. Various philosophers have addressed the question of the difference between conversation and dialogue and researchers often use the term interchangeably. However, traditionally, "the word dialogue generally is preferred by critical theorists, classicist and others who are epistemologically oriented, those who see "talk" primarily as an intellectual process of refining knowledge….The term "conversation" in contrast, is used by ontologically oriented writers (Gadamer, 1994, Rorty, 1980, 1989; Palmer, 1998) who focus more on human understanding and human experience than on abstract knowledge about ideas." (Baker, Jensen and Kolb, 2002, p. 11).

Due to the emphasis that dialogue scholars place on the cognitive as opposed to the apprehensional, contextual, and emotional aspects of an encounter between individuals, I have chosen to call the groups I interviewed "dialogue encounter groups." Although the participants themselves use the term "dialogue groups" - I believe that 'dialogue group" may not be sufficient to describe the full range of emotional as well as cognitive levels of conversation that are typically involved. Thus, I have added the term "encounter" in the sense first used by practitioners such as Kurt Lewin et al for T-groups (training groups) – also called encounter groups - at the National

Training Laboratories in Connecticut. In the original t-groups, individuals were taught to observe the nature of their interactions with others and the group process in order to better understand their own way of functioning in a group and on the job, and the impact they had on others. The dialogue-encounter groups that I met with contain elements of the cognitive dialogue as well as the encounter as it was developed in the T-group thus encompassing multiple forms of communication.

The roots of the dialogue encounter group are clearly in those of the original encounter or t-group. Both are planned, intensive groups with similar goals. The goal of the t-group, like that of a dialogue encounter group, is for participants to become more understanding in dealing with the other. Participants of both groups learn to examine their behavior and values, develop conflict resolution skills and become more successful in interpersonal relationships (Rogers, 1970, p. 2-3). Both groups emphasize human relations skills, the development and improvement of interpersonal communication and relationships through an experiential process.

Carl Rogers is another leading practitioner associated with sensitivity training groups. In his own words, Rogers' states his central hypothesis as follows: "If I can provide a certain type of relationship, the other will discover within himself [sic] the capacity to use that relationship for growth, and change and personal development will occur." The type of relationship that Rogers is talking about is one in which empathy and "unconditional positive regard" are

key constructs (Rogers, 161, On Becoming a Person). In his work *Carl Rogers on Encounter Groups*, (1970) Rogers discusses the changes or transformation that encounter group members undergo as a result of their participation in the group. He says:

> *"I have seen individuals alter, very measurably, their concepts of themselves, as they explore their feelings in an accepting climate, and receive tough and tender feedback from group members who care. I have seen persons begin to realize and bring into being more of their own potential, through their behaviors both in the group and afterward. Time and time again, I have seen individuals choose a whole new direction for their lives – philosophically, vocationally, and intellectually- as a result of an encounter group experience. …I have known individuals for whom the encounter experience has meant an almost miraculous change in the depth of their communication with spouse and children. ……It is fair to say that I have often seen tremendous changes in the relationships of persons…" (Rogers, 1970, Pp. 69-72)* as a result of participation in a group.

The transformation that Rogers perceives and discusses above is indeed similar in nature to the shift or transformation that the dialogue encounter group member undergoes.

To return to the topic of how conversation and dialogue are similar or different, it is useful to remark that conversation has an informal aspect. As one researcher in the field (Smith, 2001) has put it:

> *Describing an exchange about the state of the kitchen or the price of children's clothes as dialogue sounded rather pretentious. It is more comfortable to talk about different forms of conversation: some were*

'passing', some were 'playful', some were 'serious'. One tends to flow

into another - they were, in effect, changing conversations.

However, this is not to say that conversation is less serious than dialogue.
The philosopher, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1979), describes conversation thus:

> *[It] is a process of two people understanding each other. Thus it is a*
> *characteristic of every true conversation that each opens himself to the*
> *other person, truly accepts his point of view as worthy of consideration*
> *and gets inside the other to such an extent that he understands not a*
> *particular individual, but what he says. The thing that has to be*
> *grasped is the objective rightness or otherwise of his opinion, so that*
> *they can agree with each other on a subject. (p. 347)*

Gadamer employs the metaphor of the horizon to argue that we each bring
prejudices (or pre-judgments) to encounters. We have, what he calls, our own
'horizon of understanding'. This is 'the range of vision that includes everything
that can be seen from a particular vantage point' (ibid: 143). In conversation
[as well as in dialogue] we try to understand a horizon that is not our own in
relation to our own. We have to put our own prejudices (pre-judgments) and
understandings to the test….We have to open ourselves to the full power of
what the 'other' is saying and in so doing, we seek to discover other peoples'
standpoint and horizon. Thus, their ideas become intelligible, without our
necessarily having to agree with them (Gadamer 1979: 270). Like in dialogue,
in conversation, knowledge is not a fixed thing or commodity to be grasped. It

is not something 'out there' waiting to be discovered. Rather, it is an aspect of a process. It arises out of interaction. (Smith, 2001).

Although scholars have many different definitions for the word "dialogue." Some see it as a method of communication, others as a political term, and still others as a social-psychological process, the one thing that all seem to have in common is that dialogue is more than a back and forth of ideas or messages. It is a set of interactions between two or more people in which both or all sides are changed by the exchange.

Nancy Dixon (1996) offers this definition:

> …dialogue is talk – a special kind of talk – that affirms the person-to-person relationship between discussants and which acknowledges their collective right and intellectual capacity to make sense of the world Therefore, it is not talk that is "one way," such as a sales pitch, a directive, or a lecture; rather it involves mutuality and jointness. I do not want to suggest that dialogue is without emotion and passion or that it is without confrontation and challenge. It involves both, but within bounds that affirm the legitimacy of others' perspectives. Dialogue has the potential to alter the meaning each individual holds, and by so doing, is capable of transforming the group, organization, and society.

Although there are many researchers and scholars who examine dialogue, there are several names of theorists that come up with regularity in any

discussion of dialogue and these are Buber, Habermas, Bohm, and Freire and then there are management dialogue proponents such as Schein, Isaacs and Senge.

Martin Buber, German-Jewish philosopher, is perhaps the most widely known philosopher of dialogue. He first used the term dialogue in 1914 to describe a mode of exchange among human beings in which there is a true turning to one another and a full appreciation of another person, not as an object in a social function but as a genuine being. This type of genuine meeting Buber terms an "I-Thou" encounter, while the alternative is an "I-It." In all meeting between the I and the Thou there is also a meeting of the Eternal Thou or God.

Buber uses the word dialogue "as a label for a quality of contact that is characterized, as he clarified in I and Thou, by speaking-and-listening in which the communicators "mutually manifest senses of uniqueness, presentness, immeasurablility, evanescence and ineffability" (Buber, 1970, pp. 82-85). "…[I]t is not an esoteric, mystical or even extremely unusual quality of contact. Opportunities for it exist routinely…If appropriately facilitated, this quality of contact can change and enhance understanding, learning, medicine, family life, business, politics and more.

Jurgen Habermas, German philosopher and social theorist, proponent of the "theory of communicative action" believes too in change through communication. He states that "through reasoned communication we humans

can get beyond our biases" (Stephens, 1994). Habermas himself says "I think that a certain form of unrestrained communication brings to the fore the deepest force of reason which enables us to overcome egocentric or ethnocentric perspectives and reach an expanded…view." (Stephens, 1994)….Reason is crucial to clear communication. So, to oversimplify a little, if we believe in the importance of the universal human impulse to communicate, we have to believe in reason." Although Habermas does not here use the word "dialogue" when he talks about a "form of unrestrained communication," his description is much in line with that of Bohm and Buber.

Habermas's use of the word dialogue, though, is clearly related to debate, discussion and argument. Habermas believes the public sphere can be most effectively constituted and maintained through dialogue, acts of speech, through debate and discussion. In "Further Reflections," Habermas claims that public debate can be animated by "opinion-forming associations"- voluntary associations, social organizations, churches, sports clubs, groups of concerned citizens, grassroots movements, trade unions-to counter or refashion the messages of authority" (Soules, 2008). "For Habermas, the success of the public sphere was founded on rational-critical discourse- everyone is an equal participant and the supreme communication skill is the power of argument. Habermas, unlike Gadamer, relates communication and speech acts, discourse and dialogue to reason and rationality (Soules, 2008).

According to Habermas, change in the public sphere will occur through reasoned discourse.

Theoretical physicist and philosopher *David Bohm* also describes dialogue in terms of change and transformation. For him, though, dialogue brings an ascent to a higher level of consciousness, both individually and collectively. Bohm states that when people think together in a dialogue situation, "we might have such a coherent movement of communication, coherent not only at the level we recognized, but at the tacit level – at the level for which we have only a vague feeling. …Tacit means that which is unspoken, which cannot be described…Thought is emerging from the tacit ground, and any fundamental change in thought will come from the tacit ground, so if we are communicating at the tacit level, then maybe thought is changing." (Bohm, 1990).

David Bohm compared dialogue to superconductivity: "In superconductivity, electrons cooled to very low temperatures act more like a coherent whole than as separate parts. They flow around obstacles without colliding with one another…At higher temperatures, however, they began to act like separate parts, scattering into a random movement and losing momentum. Depending on the environment in which they operate, electrons behave in dramatically different ways. …When confronting tough issues, people act more like separate high temperature electrons. …they collide with one another at times. Dialogue seeks to alter this by producing a "cooler" shared environment, by

refocusing the group's shared attention. When this takes place, people can spend time in high energy interactions with reduced friction, without ruling out differences between them…"(Isaacs, ????)

David Bohm's linkage of dialogue with the possibilities of glimpsing a deeper order in things, and of connecting with 'unbroken wholeness in flowing movement' is very reminiscent of Martin Buber's account of the possibilities of encounter between 'man and man'. We may even to be able, as Martin Buber would have put it, "to glimpse God in our encounters, or to catch the collective consciousness." (Bohm, 1997)

Paolo Freire, is a Brazilian educator whose work has been the literacy education of adults in the Third World. For Freire "dialogue is the process through which human beings collectively transform their world. That transformation involves altering their…assumptions about their world and their relationship to it. This transformation is a change that is ongoing, a part of human development…It is the process of evolving new meaning as humans interact with their world in ways that change the world and are in turn changed by it. (Dixon, 1996, p. 22).

Freire states: to exist humanly, is to name the world, to change it" (Freire, 1970, p. 76). Dialogue then is a creative process one in which meaning is created and re-created (Dixon, p. 22). However, "it is also a social process… – the process of communicating, challenging and affirming meaning." Through this process, the world is transformed. "Naming the world,

transforming it, is the way humans find significance, thus it is an "existential necessity" and the right of everyone. For this reason, the naming cannot be done alone, not for others, for that robs them of their words." (Dixon, p. 22).

Dialogue, according to Freire (1970, p. 75) is about both reflection and action: "to speak a true word is to transform the world." By transforming the world Freire means to alter it in ways that allow people to be more human. His emphasis in this quote is, however, on the term "true." True words, spoken in dialogue with others, alter the world. This action and reflection occur simultaneously, not sequentially. In fact Freire did not dichotomize acting and reflecting: together they are praxis (Dixon, p. 22).

Buber, Freire and Bohm urge readers to practice dialogue as a way of communicating interpersonally with others. Schein, Isaacs and Senge (see above) hail from the world of management and as such see dialogue as a tool to facilitate change within an organization.

Edgar Schein, Professor of management at MIT also sees dialogue as a facilitator of reasoned change. He explains that dialogue: "is focused more on the thinking process and how our perceptions and cognitions are formed by past experiences. The assumption here is that if we become more conscious of how our thought process works, we will think better, collectively, and communicate better. An important goal of dialogue is to enable the group to reach a higher level of consciousness and creativity through the gradual

creation of a shared set of meanings and a "common" thinking process." (Schein, 1993).

As stated, theories of dialogue tend to be more cognitive than emotional. Edgar Schein's view of dialogue is that it is a communication technology which helps to improve thought processes which help people reach at least a common formulation of a problem (Schein, 1993). Schein declares that he hopes "…to show that dialogue is indeed not only different from many of the techniques that have been proposed before, but also that it has considerable promise as a problem-formulation and problem solving philosophy and technology" (Schein, 1993). Schein sees dialogue very much as a problem solving skill and he proposes that "all problem-solving groups should begin in a dialogue format to facilitate the building of sufficient common ground and mutual trust and to make it possible to tell what is really on one's mind." (Schein, 1993).

William Isaacs, a leading scholar in the field of dialogue describes dialogue also in terms of collective thinking and a process of inquiry. Thus, Isaacs reaffirms my earlier assertion that dialogue emphasizes the thinking oriented view of conversation as opposed to the emotional levels of discourse. As Isaacs asserts: "In debate, one side wins and another loses; both parties maintain their certainties, and both suppress deeper inquiry. ….Dialogue is a discipline of collective thinking and inquiry a process for transforming the quality of conversation, and in particular, the thinking that lies beneath it."

(Isaacs ???). What makes dialogue (as we are now defining it) unique is its underlying premise: that human beings operate most often within shared, living fields of assumptions and constructed embodied meaning, and that these fields tend to be unstable, fragmented, and incoherent. As people learn to perceive, inquire into, and allow transformation of the nature and shape of these fields, and the patterns of individual thinking and acting that inform them, they may discover entirely new levels of insight and forge substantive and, at times, dramatic changes in behavior. As this happens, whole new possibilities for coordinated action develop." (Isaacs, 1999)….This discipline, which involves reflection on ways of knowing, on language, and on the embodied experience of meaning, turns out to have exceedingly practical applications…." In dialogue as we use the term, people gradually learn to suspend their defensive exchanges and further, to probe into the underlying reasons for why those exchanges exist. …the central purpose is simply to establish a field of genuine meeting and inquiry (which we call a container) – a setting in which people can allow a free flow of meaning and vigorous exploration of the collective background of their thought, their personal predispositions, the nature of their shared attention, and the rigid features of their individual and collective assumptions…" (Isaacs, 1999) This free flow of inquiry and meaning allows new possibilities to emerge…Unlike most forms of inquiry, the inquiry in dialogue is one that places primacy on the whole…Dialogue seeks to unveil the ways in which collective patterns of thinking and feeling unfold – both as conditioned mechanistic reflexes, and

potentially as fluid, dynamically creative exchanges." ….. "In consensus building, people seek some rational means to limit options and focus on the ones that are logically acceptable to most people…By contrast, dialogue seeks to have people learn how to think together ….Dialogue can thus produce an environment where people are consciously participating in the creation of shared meaning…." (Isaacs, 1999). Dialogue procures insights into collective challenges that can alter people's way of thinking and acting in their system...The essence of the crisis is based in the fact that people have learned to divide the world into categories in thought and make distinctions within those categories. Though these categories are a natural mechanism to develop meaning, we have a tendency to become almost hypnotized by them, forgetting that we created them…" "It seems increasingly clear that our perceptions and thought can literally create our worlds. …Dialogue is an attempt to perceive the world with new eyes, not merely to solve problems using the thought that created them in the first instance" (Isaacs, 1999).

Management scholars, Isaacs and Schein and Senge emphasize the cognitive and intellectual aspects of dialogue at the same time downplaying conversation's emotional side, while Buber privileges the dynamic of the relationship forged between the dialoguers deeming it a true dialogue only when the participants listen to each other with mutual respect and are fully present to each other. Bohm stresses the higher consciousness achievable through dialogue and for Freire it is about authenticity. However, all stress the

transformative nature of dialogue and its potential to change the individual and even society.

The transformative power of dialogue would seem a solution to so many of the world problems. If people were just to sit down and dialogue they would change themselves and, subsequently, the world. But so often, despite the best intentions, and even when people get together with the intent and purpose of dialoguing, they fail to do so. Track 1 diplomacy (which refers to official government diplomacy) fails, negotiations fall apart, neighborly meetings devolve into shouting matches, misunderstandings between friends arise and friendships collapse. Thus, the Contact Hypothesis might give insight into why some forms of contact seem to succeed where others seem to worsen the situation causing havoc rather than harmony.

The Contact Hypothesis

The contact hypothesis has been around since the 1950s but the debate surrounding it is even more relevant than ever. The contact hypothesis, presented originally by Allport (1954) essentially states that contact between members of different groups *under certain conditions* can improve intergroup relations. One scholar comments that the Contact Hypothesis has been social science's major contribution to reducing intergroup bias and conflict (Gaertner, et al 1996) in the world.

It is important to state up front that though the contact hypothesis seems so intuitive, turned inside-out it is equally intuitive: after all, just as there cannot be connection without contact, there also cannot be violence or hostility without contact either. Perhaps a better solution to conflict is simply to separate warring groups and isolate them from one another! Many careful empirical studies have attempted to prove or disprove the contact hypothesis. (References!!!!!)

Opponents of the contact hypothesis point to the myriad studies around the question of school desegregation (References) in an attempt to answer the question of whether contact engendered by desegregation has led to a reduction of prejudice and intolerance between blacks and whites in America. The studies mostly seem to point to evidence that indicates that contact between blacks and whites in schools has NOT contributed to a lessening of racial tensions or prejudices and in some instances may even promote intolerance. Or, as Forbes points out: "[t]he correlations reported in these studies are sometimes positive, sometimes negative, generally weak and always hard to interpret." (Forbes, 1997, p. 112). However, the general conclusion to be drawn from these studies is that contact does not in itself automatically lead to a reduction of prejudices or an attenuation of intolerance.

Despite the negative or inconclusive inferences stemming from the school desegregation studies, numerous other studies of interaction over a period of

close to fifty years between different racial, national, ethnic, etc. groups *do*

show a clear and positive correlation between "interaction with members of an

ethnic out-group and positive or friendly attitudes toward that group." (Forbes,

1997, p. 111). Allport's hypothesis is supported by a multitude of studies

ranging from school and housing situations (Ford, 1986) to interracial workers

in South Africa, to German and Turkish school children, to the elderly,

homosexuals, the mentally ill, victims of AIDS, etc. (Pettigrew, 1998, p. 68) all

of which report positive effects resulting from contact and interaction.

As mentioned above, the contact hypothesis specifies certain conditions

under which intergroup contact improves relations. Allport specified four

conditions for optimal group contact: (1) equality of status of the different

groups, (2) their cooperative interdependence in the pursuit of common goals;

(3) the presence of supportive social norms and (4) sustained interactions

between individuals (Forbes, 1997, Pettigrew 1998, Amir, 1976, Allport,

1954). More recently Pettigrew (1998) added (5) the encounter should carry a

potential for the formation of friendship with members of the other group.

Limitations of the Contact Hypothesis

The Contact Hypothesis has been analyzed and critiqued for years. Many

studies have shown that contact in itself is not enough to reduce conflict and

in fact contact between two opposing groups can often exacerbate tensions.

In addition, several significant limitations to the contact hypothesis are as

follows:

1. Selection Bias – prejudiced people may avoid contact with outgroups, while those with originally more favorable views of an outgroup may seek them out. Thus, we are left with a causal-sequential or chicken and egg problem: does an increase in interaction cause a reduction in prejudice or is it that a positive ethnic attitude encourages interaction? However, Pettigrew points out that a multitude of "research finds that the positive effects of cross-group friendship are larger than those of the selection bias." (Pettigrew, 1998).

2. The contact hypothesis is right on an individual level but breaks down as a theory about processes at the group or aggregate level (Forbes, 1997, p. 198). "Contact may have beneficial effects on the attitudes of individuals and yet have no similar effects on the relations among groups." (Forbes, p. 203). In other words, participants in contact situations do not necessarily generalize their positive attitudes and perceptions (Hewstone and Brown, 1986). They may come to view the participants of the group they have come in contact with in a more positive way but not move above that small group to generalize "beyond the specific situation in which the positive contact took place and the particular individuals they have had contact with" (Hewstone and Greenland, 2000). This issue of generalizability is discussed at length below.

There are three distinct types of generalization that must be assessed: (1) Situational: do the changes generalize across situations? (2) Individual to group: do the changes generalize from the specific outgroup members with

whom there is contact to the outgroup in general? And (3) Uninvolved groups
– do the changes toward the outgroup generalize to other outgroups not
involved in the contact? (Pettigrew, 1998) (see Brewer and Miller, 1988 and
Hewstone, 1996).

Pettigrew addresses the issue of generalizability by suggesting three
strategies to enhance generalization: decategorization, salient group
categorization and recategorization. "Since similarity attracts, initial stages of
intergroup contact benefit from not making group membership salient
(emphasizing what everyone has in common). This is decategorization. Later,
as anxiety and threat subside, group membership must become salient to
maximize the generalization of positive effects beyond the immediate
situation. Then, recategorization becomes possible if the participants adopt
an all-encompassing group identification." (Pettigrew, 1998, p. 80).

3. The contact hypothesis does not address process; it predicts only
    when positive contact effects will occur and not how and why.
    Pettigrew attempts to address the question of process (the how and
    why) through a discussion about four interrelated processes that
    operate through contact and mediate attitude change: 1. learning about
    the outgroup, 2. changing behavior; 3. generating affective ties; 4.
    ingroup reappraisal.

Pettigrew explains these process stages as follows: The first step is to learn
about the outgroup. This in and of itself is a start but not enough to reduce

prejudice (Pettigrew, 1998). The next step is behavior change: "Optimal intergroup contact acts as a benign form of behavior modification. Behavior change is often a precursor of attitude change." (Pettigrew, 1998). Third step, generating affective ties. "Emotion is critical in intergroup contact" Anxiety is common in initial encounters and can spark negative reactions. Such anxious negative encounters can occur even without intergroup prejudices. Continued contact generally reduces anxiety just as positive emotions aroused by optimal contact can also mediate intergroup contact effects. Empathy plays a role here. Positive emotions aroused by intergroup friendship also can be pivotal." Amir (1976) concerning the importance of intimacy in intergroup contact: "In short, like prejudice, contact involves both cognition and affect." and Finally, Ingroup reappraisal. "Optimal intergroup contact provides insight about ingroups as well as outgroups. Ingroup norms and customs turn out not to be the only ways to manage the social world. This new perspective can reshape your view of your ingroup and lead to a less provincial view of outgroups in general." (Pettigrew, 1997, p. 72). My study will explore these processes, the behavior and attitude changes that occur and how they occur in the group as well as the affect and positive emotion as it has developed in the groups I am researching.

Pettigrew's conclusions: "optimal intergroup contact requires time for cross group friendships to develop. …once we adopt a long-term perspective that allows cross group friendship to develop and the full decategorization, salient categorization and recategorization sequence to unfold, we can expect

striking results. Such a revised perspective explains why extended intergroup

contact often has more positive results than either the contact hypothesis or

cognitive analysis predict" The power of cross group friendship to reduce

prejudice and to generalize to other outgroups demands a fifth condition for

the contact hypothesis: The contact situation must provide the participants

with the opportunity to become friends.

Social Identity Theory

Identity-based conflicts are difficult to define because they are rooted in

"complex and multidimensional psychological, historical and cultural factors."

(Rothman, 1997). They are characterized by passion, violence and deep

seated antagonism. They are unlike interest-based conflicts, or "real"

conflicts, which can be resolved when the issue at hand is settled. For

example, in a dispute over property between neighbors, a legal institution can

determine who owns what and the quarrel can be settled, leaving each party

to live in peace and harmony with its neighbors. However, when the

properties are seen to reflect the identity of the group or when an attack on

the property is perceived as an assault on the self-esteem of the group, then

the basis of the conflict shifts to a strike or a defense of the identity of the

group (Smyth, 2002). Yes, the Middle East conflict is about "access to water,

transportation routes and control of airspace; but to a negotiator these are all

matters that can – at least potentially – be resolved through a process of give

and take." (Albright, 2006, p. 129). The give and take breaks down over

questions of identity. "Identity conflicts are marked by a difficulty in clear determination of their parameters and boundaries. In fact such conflicts are so intangible and hard to define because they arise from the depths of the human heart rather than the material world." (Rothman, 1997). The Middle East conflict has long since ceased to be about "parameters and boundaries." It is clearly a full-blown identity-based conflict exacerbated by the enmeshed lives and constant contact between Israelis and Palestinians in a small geographical space, thus Social Identity Theory is clearly relevant to a study of this nature.

The underlying premise of Social Identity Theory is that a social category provides a definition of who we are. This means that we all affiliate and identify with a larger group, such as our country, nation, ethnic group and religion, organization, work group and social club. When asked "who am I?" people reply with group identities. Each group identity – also called a social category - then describes and prescribes a person's attributes as a member of that group. The theory of social identity first formulated by Henry Tajfel (Tajfel, 1978) suggests that a person begins to think and feel and behave in a certain manner because of his or her membership in that particular group. We humans are motivated to uphold a positive view of ourselves and, as a result, in-group biases are formed. These lead as a matter of course to negative perceptions of others who are not part of the group – or the out-group - and stereotyping of these outgroup members is a natural result.

Social identities, thus, describe us and others, but also prescribe our

behaviors and our expectations of how others will behave and finally also

furnish a value judgment with regard to our in-group members and the

outgroup members. In-group – outgroup comparisons usually favor the in-

group. The inference from all this is that it is natural and a normal part of

social life to favor the in-group and to devalue and the out-group.

In sum, Social Identity Theory invokes two underlying socio-cognitive

processes:

1- Categorization. We categorize members of our group producing group-

distinctive stereotyping and normative perceptions and actions and

assign people including ourselves to the contextually relevant

category. This helps reduce uncertainty about ourselves and others

and where we stand in specific social contexts.

2- Self enhancement – ingroup norms and stereotypes tend to favor the

ingroup. People have a very basic need to see themselves in a positive

light in relation to others so we make comparisons between ingroup

and outgroup in ways that favor our ingroup.

(Hogg and Terry, 2001, Pp – 2-4)

The implications of Social Identity Theory for intergroup conflict are that

relations between people who affiliate with different groups will be determined

by several factors: social context, group influences and individual perceptions.

Context seems to play a major role in determining salience of level of identity from which an individual will perceive, feel, and act. The overall assumption is that the more intense the intergroup conflict, the more likely it is that members of opposite groups will act toward each other out of their respective group memberships rather than in terms of their individual characteristics or inter-individual relationships.

Thus, if the intensity of the conflict imposes blinders that prevent group members from seeing each other as individuals and blocks them from forming relationships outside their group membership, one is left with a sense of hopelessness. To counteract that, I now turn to the question of how change happens, how transformation occurs in the context of intergroup conflict. In my next section I will discuss the possibility of changing, transforming or shifting attitudes of group members in the context of conflict.

The Shift or Transformation

There is evidence from much literature on dialogue groups in various conflicts that when a dialogue encounter is successful a remarkable transformation occurs among participants (Maoz et al (2002), Carstarphen, 2002). Carstarphen defines this shift as "a positive, qualitative change in the relationship between conflict parties, including changed attitudes toward oneself and the other party, the conflict issues, and the conflict situation as a whole." (Carstarphen, 2002). A detailed description of the shift or transformation that occurs is as follows:

… shift occurs in individual attitudes (thoughts and feelings) at the

individual dimension—attitudinal shift— and is expressed through

communication and behaviors in the transactional dimension—

behavioral shift. The process for achieving shift is both an individual

psychological process and a transactional process between individuals

and groups. Further, when individuals from different sides experience

both attitudinal and behavioral shifts, the result is a shift in the

relationship between the parties. Thus, there may be individual,

interpersonal, intergroup shifts and a shift in the total group or a "total

group phenomenon" (Stock & Lieberman, 1981, cited in Pearson,

1990). As Borris (1998a, 1998b) notes, if we can better understand the

process of "healing the heart" at the individual level, we can then look

to the implications of this for healing between people and groups at

larger levels. (Carstarphen 2002).

Alternative words commonly used to describe shift are, transformation, turning points, breakthroughs, and "aha" moments:

As other researchers have described, the transformation consists of greater personal empathy among participants, a breaking down of "us" and "them" thinking and the formation of genuine friendships: "The boundaries of the self are extended toward the inclusion of the other within the self. That is, the other is included within the realm of relational moral responsibility; perceptions of and relations to the other are transformed; and there is a

greater understanding, acceptance and connectedness to the other's experiences and positions" (Maoz, et al 2002 Human Relations and she quotes Gergen, 1999; Lannamann, 1999; McNamee and Gergen, 1999). There has been very little investigation into the actual dialogue process through which these transformations take place (Maoz, et al (2002).

The Palestinian Israeli conflict is an identity based conflict which carries over then because it is not just a real conflict, it carries over to anywhere in the world and not just the middle east so most of the same issues that face the people in the middle east also face their Diaspora members whether they be in West Coast, the Midwest or the East Coast, anywhere else in the United States or other parts of the world. Thus, contact between these groups can unfold either as the contact hypothesis would lead us to expect: under the wrong conditions lead to further conflict but under the right conditions lead to reduction in tensions and better relationships among the group members. Social identity theory also helps us understand how the groups view each other and why. True dialogue if it is indeed practiced and not dispute or debate can lead to transformation – a cognitive and affective shift in people on an individual level leading to a shift in the social levels and finally leading – in theory at least – to a shift in the conflict itself on a societal level.

As I stated in the opening paragraph of this chapter, the four literature streams relevant to my study: the Contact Hypothesis, Social Identity Theory,

the literature on Dialogue and the literature on the phenomenon of shift

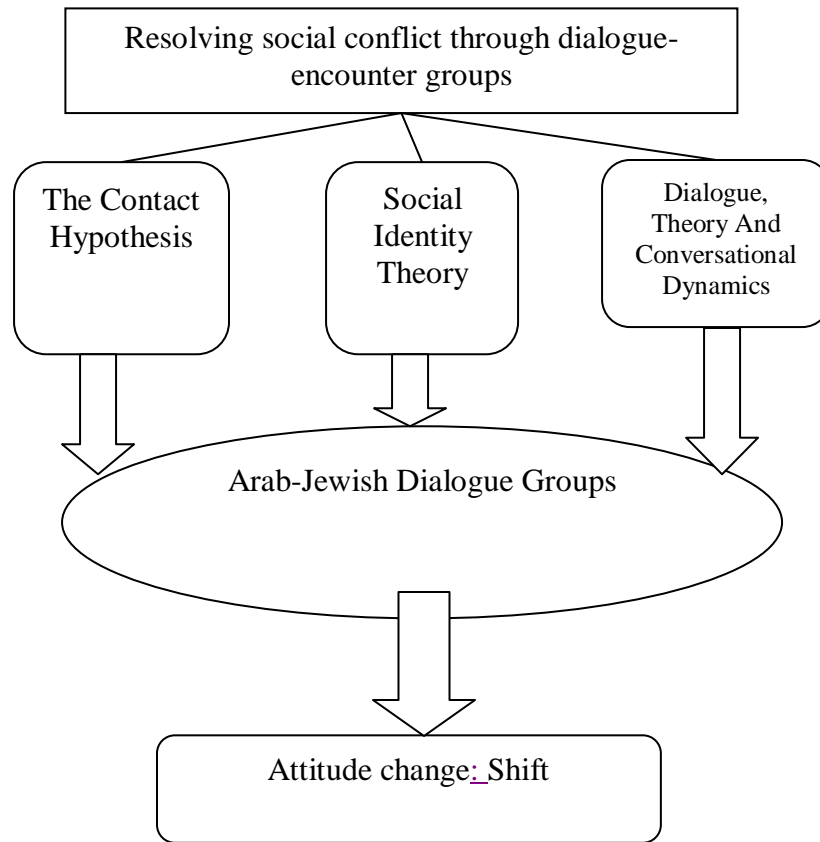hammered together form an analytic framework for my study.

My research questions that derive from the literature are as follows:

- The contact hypothesis suggests that under certain conditions, contact between members of different groups can improve intergroup relations and reduce tensions and hostility. **Is there evidence from the case studies I compiled to support the contact hypothesis? Are relations between the Arabs and Jews in the dialogue groups improved by contact?**

- Social identity theory claims – as stated originally by Henry Tajfel (1978) - that a person begins to think and feel and behave in a certain manner because of his or her membership in a particular group. **How do these intergroup dynamics play out in the dialogue group and how might those dynamics be conducted in order to affect a positive outcome for the group. Can social identity theory be harnessed to improve intergroup relations in a dialogue group and thus reduce tensions and hostility?**

- The literature on dialogue theory suggests a number of critical dimensions necessary for successful interactions. These dimensions include: active listening to enhance learning and to balance perceptions; a focus on personal storytelling instead of on "facts"; suspension of assumptions; establishing psychological safety; expansion, or embracing ambiguity as opposed to a polarization of

opinion; and finding shared meaning. **Are the groups conducting**

dialogue? Are the dimensions of dialogue present? What

happens in these groups when the dimensions of dialogue exist

and what happens when the dimensions are not present?

- The phenomenon of shift is a positive transformation, a cognitive and

  affective change in relations. **In the sample that I have interviewed,**

  do shifts occur and what is the nature of these shifts?

- **What is the impact of the dimensions of dialogue on shift?**

- **What can be learned from the three case studies on how to**

  improve the effectiveness of group dialogue in social conflict?

See the table below for a graphic illustration of this framework:

Resolving social conflict through dialogue-encounter groups

The Contact Hypothesis

Social Identity Theory

Dialogue, Theory And Conversational Dynamics

Arab-Jewish Dialogue Groups

Attitude change: Shift

By asking these questions I hope to obtain a better understanding both of the external and internal landscape of the dialogue group and its role in conciliating conflict and to theorize as to how such a transformative experience can be generalized. Ultimately, I anticipate that my research will contribute to our practical knowledge and theoretical understanding of conflict resolution in intractable, identity-based, ethno-political conflicts.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

I have met with and actively observed three separate sustained Arab-Jewish dialogue groups meeting in the United States for at least a year and have conducted 28 individual one-on-one interviews with members of six different groups, a mix of Arabs and Jews. In my analysis, I focus on three groups: the first group I will call West Town, the second North Town and the third East Town (details are intentionally vague to protect the confidentiality of my interviewees). My research goals were twofold: First, I hoped to obtain a richly-descriptive picture of these three groups as comparative case studies. In so doing, I have sought first to understand whether the encounter improved relations between the groups, how the intergroup dynamics played out in the group, whether the dimensions of dialogue were in fact adhered to, and how the dialogue transformed the individual participants. Second, I applied phenomenological methods to gain a clear example of a dialogue group experience that many have described as a "shift" or transformation.

In the first part, the comparative case study, I explored the circumstances and processes of the dialogue groups; while in the phenomenological section, I explored the internal "transformation" or shift in group members' cognitive and affective perceptions of the others. The comparative case study has produced a rich thick description of the landscape of dialogue groups, whereas the phenomenological study accessed the internal psychological experience of transformation itself.

My choice of qualitative methods stems from a conviction that inductive, qualitative work is best suited to inquire into, explore and describe the subjective and transpersonal dimensions of human experience that are not easily quantifiable and explainable (Saunders, 1999). Also, qualitative methods view the research as a process of co-creation hinging on the dialogic relationship between the researcher and the co-inquirer, which seems singularly relevant for a study of dialogue groups. Creswell (1994) defines qualitative study as "an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting (i.e. not a laboratory). (pp 1-2). Creswell's description applies faithfully to my intended research.

Data Collection

An educated guess puts the number of Arab-Jewish dialogue groups actively meeting in cities in the US at least 50 – 60 (perhaps more). This number includes groups that are Muslim–Jewish, Arab–Jewish or Palestinian–Jewish. Many of these groups also include members who are of neither of these two main groups but are termed "interested others." I have met with three such dialogue groups. The first, the West Town group, in some ways can be considered the Ur group (i.e. the original group). They have been meeting for seventeen years and they – especially two of their members who are also the facilitators - have become very active in disseminating information,

encouraging new groups and maintaining a network via email and Internet of all the activities and groups that have been in contact with them. The second group, from North Town, is an all women group of Arabs and Jews that has been meeting for over seven years. The third is an Arab-Jewish dialogue group from East Town which met for a year and numbered approximately 25 regular participants. (In addition I spoke to two members of a group on the West Coast and the facilitator of a group in Texas, which numbers 12-14 members. They have been meeting since September 11, 2005).

I attended a session with each one of the groups to observe, absorb, and explore the dynamic of the group and to apply a collective interview in which I attempt through a series of questions to elicit the story of the group beginning with how and why they formed and continuing with the processes they developed. This session was recorded and also transcribed although in so doing the speaker's identity was lost (the transcriptionist and I **couldn't** identify who was speaking after the fact), however, the essence of the conversation was preserved. I also asked if their perceptions had changed and ended with questions related to the group's relationship with the community and any activism they might be undertaking.

Group Interview Protocol

1. Tell me the story of your group (this question gives them an opportunity to begin talking without my supplying any "leading" questions. If this does not get them talking, I have a list of "prompts")

2. How did you find/invite/choose your members?

3. Where and when did you/do you meet? How did you decide to do it this way? (I'm interested in the "safety" of the dialogue group environment).

4. Do you have a facilitator? To the group: What was the role of your facilitator? To the facilitator: What was your role as facilitator or how did you perceive the role of the facilitator?

5. When were you most excited to be part of this group?

6. Did you begin with any theory, goal, objective that was either implicit, or explicit? Stated, declared or simply assumed? What are your guidelines if any?

7. Has involvement in the group changed or affected your relationship with others within your community?

8. Do you meet outside of the group? (I want to find out if new relationships/friendships have formed as a result of the group). Do you visit each other's homes? Socialize?

9. Has your group engaged in any political or community action? Have you made any public statements?

10. Did you change as a result of the dialogue experience. What has changed?

11. How did/does your interaction in your dialogue orbit out to others… (ripple effect)?

12. Where do you envision your group within a year? Five years?

Individual Interview Protocol

1. What drew you to dialogue? (Precedents)

2. Tell me of a time when you were most excited to be part of this group?

3. Where do you hope the group will go in future? What is your vision of the

future?

When listening and observing the groups I found it difficult at times to

maintain a neutral, observer stance and not jump in with some observation of

my own. However, I resisted the urge to dive into the discussion because I felt it was important to watch the proceedings unfold with as little direction or input from me. The struggle though to observe and not participate was very much a part of my experience as researcher. There was one particular time, with the East Town group when I visited the group itself and found myself to be in the presence of either Palestinian Americans or interested others who – to my mind – were rabidly anti-Israeli and pro-Palestinian that I felt distinctly uncomfortable.

I also met with individual members of the groups to conduct one-on-one interviews for the phenomenological portion of my dissertation. These interviews were designed to ask questions revolving around the shift in perceptions or transformation they had undergone as a result of participation in the group. Here the neutral, objective role was even more difficult to maintain because clearly I was a Jewish Israeli researcher and that impacted the interviews themselves. I sensed that some of the Jewish interviewees were comfortable speaking with me because I belonged to their group. Some of the Arab participants were more reluctant to speak with me and it is not surprising that I have more Jewish than Arab interviewees (60% - 40%). However, I do want to mention that most of the Arab interviewees were warm and receptive. I felt that after a few minutes of conversation, we were able to establish rapport and an ease of communication and that I feel the ensuing interviews were extremely rich and rewarding as a result of the human connection that was established. So, in a sense, even as I was interviewing, I

was actually dialoguing, and attempting – sometimes successfully – to have an I-Thou meeting with my interviewees. I have – at times –speculated privately as to whether the tenor or content of the interview would have been different had an Arab been the interviewer for the Palestinian participants.

Next I transcribed the groups' sessions and one-on-one interviews, seeking themes, attempting an embryonic theory which I then had the opportunity to apply to the next group and so on.

The Case Study

According to case study researcher Robert K. Yin,

> *Case study research continues to be an essential form of social science inquiry. The method is appropriate when investigators either desire or are forced by circumstances (a) to define research topics broadly and not narrowly, (b) to cover contextual or complex multivariate conditions and not just isolated variables, and (c) to rely on multiple and not singular sources of evidence." (Yin, Applications, 2003, p. xi).*

The Case Study allowed me to look at events retrospectively taking into consideration history, cultural context, internal processes and external media events, collecting data through the multiple sources of a group interview, individual open-ended interviews and a review of current events that occurred during the time that the group had been meeting.

Explanatory and Descriptive Case Study

Both the explanatory and descriptive case studies are relevant for my research. An explanatory case study seeks to explain how and why events occurred. "Embedded in the explanation is a potential causal path, whereby a case study seems to be making an inroad in to the attribution problem." (Yin applications 2003, p. 69) A descriptive case study "is not an expression of a cause-effect relationship. Rather, a descriptive theory covers the scope and depth of the … case being described." My study is explanatory because I am trying to explain a cause/effect sequence; namely, how the processes of the dialogue encounter group experience cause a shift or transformation in the perceptions and mindset of the participants. My study is also descriptive because it covers the internal and external processes of the dialogue encounter group experience and essentially it is a description of the story of the group.

Selection Criteria

The question of how to define the unit of analysis (the case) is possibly more important for case studies than for other types of research. "It is essential to identify the criteria for selecting and screening potential candidates for the cases studied, and to suggest the relevant variables of interest and therefore data to be collected as part of the case study." (Yin, 2003, p. 3). For my study, the unit of analysis is the Arab-Jewish dialogue encounter groups meeting in the United States over a sustained period of time. However, choosing which

groups to study out of the approximately 50 or so known groups that are meeting is a more important question. It was important to me that the group be sustained, which I defined as meeting for at least a year, so that it had time to go through a group dynamic life cycle. It was important that the group be composed of a majority of Arabs and Jews, though interested others are also often attracted to and participate in such groups.

To find such groups I spoke with two of the leading social entrepreneurs in this field, Libby and Len Traubman, who work tirelessly to promote Arab-Jewish dialogue in the US, who maintain a network of such groups and who have also been instrumental in starting many such groups in the US. Their recommendations have been invaluable to me. The two criteria for an exemplary case is that the group members self define themselves as having undergone a "transformative" experience in the group and that their meetings have led to the members' carrying the mission of process of change to others locally in the community and beyond. The East Town group might be deemed the most problematic in these terms as many of the original members left and did not feel they had undergone a transformative experience while part of the group. However, the group itself, though evolved, has remained active and those that have continued believe themselves a successful group. If nothing else, this group serves as a control, or contrast to my two other vibrant groups. As Yin points out, only a small number of cases can be the subject of study because of the "desire to collect extensive data from each case, desire

to investigate the dynamics of each arrangement and not just apply "input-output framework."

Theory and case study

Determining where the description of the case begins and ends, what the description should include, represents the "theory" of the case study research. According to Yin, this theory "should be openly stated ahead of time, should be subject to review and debate and will later serve as the design for a descriptive case study. A thoughtful theory will help to produce a sound descriptive case study." (Yin, 2003, p. 23). "Reliance on theoretical concepts to guide the design and data collection for case studies remains one of the most important strategies for completing successful case studies. Such theoretical concepts can be useful in conducting exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory (cause) case studies. The multiple perspectives that the Case Study requires provided me with a rich database from which to discern themes and notice differences, thereby enabling the "pattern-matching" which can establish meaningful relationships, and link the data to propositions and theory in an inductive process via "explanation building" (Yin 1994, Campbell 1975). As well, since I conducted research at three separate sites, the comparative case study allowed me to add variability to my sample and therefore, "to move back and forth between the sites and data sets, formulating theory in one setting and then immediately placing the embryonic

ideas in other contexts for potential confirmation, disconfirmation or vivification" (Poonamallee, unpublished dissertation, 2007).

The goal is to develop preliminary concepts at the outset of a case study. One purpose served by such concepts is to place the case study in an appropriate research literature, so that lessons from the case study will more likely advance knowledge and understanding of a given topic and this I did in Chapter two of this dissertation.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a method that derives knowledge about the essence of an emotional experience. It entails an examination of experience in order "to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience. …The human scientist determines the underlying structures of an experience by interpreting the originally given descriptions of the situation in which the experience occurs." (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). The aim of phenomenology is "to develop a complete, accurate, clear and articulate description and understanding of a particular human experience or experiential moment – a rich, deep 'snapshot' of an experience that includes qualities at many levels of experience (i.e. bodily, feelings) but especially at pre-reflective levels. (Braud and Anderson, 1998, p. 264). The reader of a phenomenological study should come away with a feeling that "I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that." (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 46).

In phenomenological investigations, the interview is the primary data collection source. The interview involves an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended questions (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). The researcher uses his or her interview protocol only as a guide to fully explore the phenomenon and to allow the interviewee to describe more fully the experience. An interview guide is intended to evoke descriptions and to search for meanings. A typical question for my study would be: Tell me a story about when you began to understand the person from the other side of the conflict.

Since the purpose of a phenomenological study is to study human emotionality, the goal of this research was to answer the question "what is common across the experience of shift?" What is the common core structure of shift that is universal for everyone? Ultimately I have presented the outcome of the analysis in the form of a synthesis or a meta-story as prescribed by Moustakas (1994) and other scholars of the method.

"Giorgi (1985) outlines two descriptive levels of the empirical phenomenological approach. Level I, the original data is comprised of naïve descriptions obtained through open-ended questions and dialogue. On Level II, the researcher describes the structures of the experience based on reflective analysis and interpretation of the research participant's account or

story." (p. 69). "The aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions general or universal meanings are derived, in other words the essences or structures of the experience." (Moutstakas, 94, p. 13).

Summary of the method of analysis:

1. The researcher reads the entire description of the learning situation straight through to get a sense of the whole

2. Next, the researcher reads the same description more slowly and delineates each time that a transition in meaning is perceived with respect to the intention of discovering the meaning (Giorgi, 1979 p. 83). From this procedure the researcher obtains a series of meaning units or constituents.

3. The researcher then eliminates redundancies and clarifies or elaborates to himself [*sic*] the meaning of the units he just constituted by relating them to each other and to the sense of the whole.

4. The researcher reflects on the given units, still expressed essentially in the concrete language of the subject, and comes up with the essence of that situation for the subject. Each unit is systematically interrogated for what it reveals. The researcher transforms each unit, when relevant into the language of psychological science.

5. The researcher synthesizes and integrates the insights achieved into a consistent description of the structure of learning. (Giorgi, p. 83).

The understanding of meaningful concrete relations implicit in the original description of the experience in the context of a particular situation is the primary target of phenomenological knowledge. In summary, the table below links my research questions as outlined at the end of Chapter 2 with my methodology as it is delineated above.

Methodology for Answering the Research Questions:

Firstly, as an overview of the methods- As Moutstakas suggests above, I did in fact read through the interview transcripts several times to get a whole sense of the story of each of the groups and also to get a feel for the phenomenological experience of 'shift." Next, I read the transcripts and focused firstly only on the case study portion, attempting to compose the "story" of each group, extracting passages of the text that related to the chronological narrative as well as the most salient events that occurred in each group. Certain interviews were particularly relevant for such a reading and I imported long quotes that fit well together to create a coherent narrative of each group. I chose to relate events that - in my opinion - changed the group or propelled them to a new level of cohesiveness or development. The case studies are related in chapters 4, 5 and 6 of this dissertation.

As far as the phenomenological aspect of this study, I searched the transcripts for testimonies of shift and then deliberately removed these passages from the context of the chronological narrative of the groups. Putting them side by side, removing the names and affiliations of the quotes, I began looking for themes, universals, repetitions, and, as Moustaskas suggests, attempted to give them meaning.

The passages of text now became units that could be reflected upon, moved around, compared with others, elaborated upon etc. In so doing, I sought out the essence of the phenomenon of shift, how people change, in what ways were they transformed, whether there were universals in the transformation or whether the transformation could be quantified in any way. For the most part, I followed Moustaskas' prescription; however, it wasn't as neat as described by Moustaskas. This turned out not be a linear process because at times I discovered that I had missed an important testimonial or something had stuck in my mind that later I realized was important and so I went back to the transcripts several times and continued to review, revise and refine my analysis.

Research Question	Methodology for answering
The Contact Hypothesis: Are relations between the Arabs and Jews in the dialogue groups improved by contact?	Read transcripts; understand the conditions under which contact does in fact improve intergroup relations. Discover if the conditions exist in the dialogue groups.
Social Identity Theory: Can our understanding of social identity theory be used to reduce tensions and	Read transcripts and research on social identity theory. Find passages in which social identity theory occurs in groups.

improve relations in an Arab-Jewish dialogue group	
What are the dimensions of dialogue and how do they impact the group?	Read transcripts, identify passages in the group interviews that describe intergroup dynamics; find recurring themes and draw out those elements linking the dimensions of dialogue and how they impact group.
Do shifts occur among my interviewees and how does my research illuminate the phenomenon of shift?	Compare interview transcripts from the interviewees and identify those passages that discuss shift or transformation. What common themes arise?
How do the dimensions of dialogue relate to shift? What specific processes must a dialogue group undergo in order to reach shift?	Reflect on the dimensions of dialogue and the passages illuminating the phenomenon of shift. Integrate the insights and attempt to find a pattern.
What can be learned from the three case studies on how to improve the effectiveness of group dialogue in social conflict?	Sift through the transcripts; find the lessons on dialogue that are apparent in each of the groups and compile a list reflecting this.

In chapters four, five and six, I report a chronological narrative of the three groups, in which I focus on peak experiences as reported by my interviewees. I weave together the threads from the various interviews and consolidate them into a coherent narrative which tells the story of each group. In chapter 7, I look at the groups together to analyze their dialogue. In chapter 8, I discuss dialogue and its dimensions. In chapter 9, I focus on the phenomenon of shift on an individual level and in chapter 10 I attempt to bring together the disparate strands and offer some suggestions for generalizing my findings.

Part II: Case Studies

Chapter 4: The West Town Group

The Jewish-Palestinian Living Room dialogue group was established in 1992 by a Jewish couple, residents of West Town. The couple shepherd the West Town dialogue group, which is possibly the longest running group of its kind. It has spawned and influenced many other groups, which is why it is often referred to as the Ur-group.

The Idea

L (the wife) reminisces about the early days and how the idea for the group germinated:

We didn't just start the Jewish-Palestinian living room dialogue out of a conscious thought process in the moment. It evolved from participating in a conference that we helped host which started three years earlier… We had been asked by a Palestinian man and his friend, an Israeli Jewish man from the Middle East to host something in the United States because these two men knew each other and were friends, and wanted to talk about the nature of things [of the middle east conflict], what they could do to change things, but they really weren't allowed to have any kind of formal conference to get together; it wasn't allowed, it was against the law [in Israel and Palestine].

In an article written about them published in the West Town County Times, Tuesday, September 25, 2001 called "Partners in Peace: Jewish-Palestinian group learns to listen and understand each other" by staff writer Alina Larson.

"The Ts began by participating in a group called Beyond War, which helped

bring Soviets and Americans together through both talks and writing… ``We

feel like that activity and building those relationships worked globally," says

Libby. ``We felt it definitely had an impact." In 1991, when the Foundation for

a Global Community and Stanford University brought together Palestinian and

Israeli community leaders for a week-long retreat in the Santa Cruz

Mountains, the Ts assisted. The conference resulted in the document called

``A Framework for a Public Peace Process," which L (wife) describes as ``a

call for a national dialogue, describing how to build a relationship and a

common future." As the leaders lectured on these topics in their homeland,

Libby… decided that they wanted to support the cause locally. And the

Jewish-Palestinian Dialogue Group began.

L (wife) recalls the first conference that brought together Palestinian and

Israeli leaders, which eventually led to the idea for founding the Palestinian-

Jewish Living Room Dialogue Group.

*The first conference… in 1991… eleven people came from the Middle East.
We went for one week to our retreat in the S-C Mountains. We had Harold
Saunders, the assistant secretary of state, who helped moderate the
conference. We had a whole support team. It was a very interactive week.
The participants washed dishes together; they took walks in the woods; they
purged their emotions; they were very real and honest with each other, but
they were also able at the time to begin working on a document that started to
emerge, because Harold Saunders was taking lots of notes about all their
ideas, what they saw as the ideal for Jerusalem, for instance.*

*What emerged was this paper called Framework for a Public Peace Process,
and this document, although not legal by political standards, had all the
elements in it of what peace could look like, how it could emerge. It had the
basics. The PLO gave their consent, and so there was this big ceremony at*

Stanford, where the public was invited and very formally, all the participants signed this document and then they took copies of it back to Israel and Palestine, had lots of press about it, gave it to the Knesset, we gave it to members of Congress, ...

So, on the last page of this document, the participants of the conference challenged people to dialogue about this issue. They said every citizen should be aware of this and talking about it. So, after this three years of figuring out who should come, raising the money, working on the elements of the seminar, what we were going to talk about, what kind of questions, who was going to take notes, what were our hopes and everything, and then L and I followed this group of people back to Israel, to Jerusalem, stayed there for a week, and to help them gel as a team, and to get this document out into the public.

When we came home from that, we said to ourselves, "oh my goodness, we've just been part of this life-changing experience for us." We didn't know Palestinians--we didn't know anything about this. It wasn't even in our thinking, really. And so, we said, "what can we do now to help, to further this? What's the next step?" And because we realized in the document it said, every person should be dialoguing about this issue, we said, why don't we start some local dialogue and just bring some American Jews and Palestinians together and see what they're thinking about, how they feel about this, and that's what we did.

Forming the Group

Taking the idea and turning it into reality is never easy and there were pitfalls

along the way.

L (wife) remembers how it began:

So we said, okay, let's see if we can round up some interested participants and we'll meet in our living room. And then, that took about six months, because, to find the right people who were really interested, willing to make the commitment, was not as easy as you would think. We'd talk to some Jewish people, and they'd say, ah, I don't really care that much, or I don't know that much about it, or, I'm not a good person to ask, but try so and so, and so and so, and so. We would follow these leads, and call people up, and interview them, and ask if they'd be interested until we got a collective of Jews who were very interested, and then it was even a bigger challenge to find the Palestinians, because we didn't know any, and that was sort of a unique process, because it was like, well, how do we start? Well, our daughter had a good friend who worked at a deli, a local deli, and the people were Palestinian.

So, I started going up and introducing myself to the S family, and saying what we were doing and that we'd like them to participate--I kept going up and every time I'd go up, they'd fix me a sandwich and we'd sit and chat and have a really good time, and I said, okay, the next meeting is this coming Wednesday and they'd say, oh, we'll be there, and I'd go back tell the group, oh, the S family are going to come and they wouldn't show up. And for months they kept telling me they'd come and then they wouldn't show up, and finally, I went up and said, listen, I'm not going to stop asking you to come until you either show up or tell me you're not going to show up, and Aham said, you really do want us to participate! And I was like, of course I do! You think I've been coming up all this time asking you just for fun? Just for sandwiches?

So he said, well, okay. I told him about the next meeting, and he came with two other couples. So, the doorbell rings, I go to the door, and there are six fabulous Palestinians who walked in together, and that was the real beginning. We had a few Palestinians who were in the group, but this really made it. They really made the numbers equal, and they were Palestinians who were respected in the community, and kind of grassroots people who had all left because it wasn't safe.
We were introduced to our neighbor E B who turned out to live a block from our house and was a real refugee--had lost everything--and suddenly the group got formed, and that's how we got started. We didn't know where it would go or how it would work, we didn't know whether we'd last for six months or for a year or what to expect, and it just kept rolling along.

The group is now in its 18th year throughout which membership has been fluid: participants have quit the group and new ones have joined; some members have moved away, some to retirement homes and some have even passed away.

Facilitation

Facilitation, especially in the early formative days of a group, is essential. L (wife) explains:

When we first started, we had a professional facilitator in our group, …, who was a lawyer mediator facilitator--not Jewish, not Arab--had consent by the group. Sometimes, when you can get a participant in the group who has that

knowledge, and can play that role it's very helpful. Because, when you start these groups, they don't want to hire or pay somebody. I mean, it would be nice if we all could, but-- you don't want to get groups to get stuck because they can't pay, so if you can find somebody who the group trusts to facilitate, it's great. We'd been lucky to have XXX who helped start the group and participated, and he facilitated for a number of years.

For other groups, we suggest that, if they don't have a professional like that, for a Jew and an Arab in each group to co-facilitate, and that means they have to have a working agreement between themselves, of how they're going to do it, how they're going to share it, what the agenda's going to look like, and how that works, but they also have to have buy-in from the group as a whole.

Group Process: ground rules, psychological safety, listening and

sharing

L (wife) that one of the secrets to the group's longevity is the ground rules that

kept them focused.

I think our group has lasted and was sustained because we have rules about what dialogue is, and what it is not, and we lay them out very specifically in the beginning and we ask people's buy-in and the group evolves their own rules. I mean, we describe what dialogue was and how it's going to make our group unique and different, than a conversation or a debate group, … and then, if people say, that sounds good, then we form our own rules. What does that mean to you? That you're going to listen. How are you going to listen? What does it mean about interrupting or not? How long are you going to talk? etc.

Listening is the first rule. L (the husband) talks about building relationships

through listening and sharing emphasizing the emotional aspects of the

dialogue encounter:

Listening is one of the great acts of love. …because we haven't been listening to each other, there's a lot of misinformation, stereotyping, assumptions that we make and we're further apart in many ways than we've ever been from each other and from ourselves and from the rest of the world. So, I think that understanding that it's important to be good listeners is a key principle, and to

be interested in getting to know the Other, whomever and whatever that may be is a really important principle right now.

L (wife) continues:

Of course, with our 16 year-old group, we've gotten much more relaxed with the rules. We've been together so long, and you know that people aren't going to leave. There's trust in the room, and so, we're not as iron-fisted about following the rules, but I think in the beginning, it's really important to have agreements so that everybody feels they can participate and be heard and there has to be some control over it. It's not that you don't have feelings, it's not that you're not allowed to have emotions, and of course, people do, but there are rules about blaming and getting hostile or violent or whatever.

Telling Stories – the basis of it all

The facilitators of the West Town group have placed special emphasis on the telling of stories as essential to the group. One of their favorite quotes is "an enemy is one whose story you have not heard." The telling of personal stories is the basis of it all.

Members of the group have stated that what sustain them as a group are the stories. One member recalls belonging to a dialogue group in Chicago before they moved to West Town, but "there was no dialogue of any kind. Everybody had an idea and these ideas were clashing constantly. To join a group like this is to listen to people's stories and not make a judgment about these stories…We learned to do that in this group. I had never done that before." Another group member takes the idea of telling personal stories further: "…on telling stories, we get to know each other on a personal level, and once you get to know a person, you know how to handle them and you feel kind of

closer to them. …It's why we keep coming. Yes, by telling our stories…that

makes it very, very personal. I come to know you as a friend…I feel a very

close tie on a personal level and that I've gained a friend."

A third group member, shares: "There's no bias when you're listening to

somebody's story in this group. Unlike the press which never reports a story

without bias…But when I listen to people telling their stories, I don't get that

feeling at all. They're giving me an unbiased story that they went through.

There's no attempt to say who's right and who's wrong and that's important."

And then: "Every story has two sides to it…in order for a story to be a peace

story we have to get the other side of the story. We have to incorporate the

other side of the story in order for our story to become complete. It must

become enmeshed."

L (husband) sums up the importance of storytelling:

I think that people don't understand the importance of the individual and the power of story. …As Elie Wiesel says: people become the stories they hear and the stories they tell. Sometimes you are so self-involved, you do not understand the impact of your own story on the people who hear it.

Telling stories may seem almost too simple and perhaps too placid, too

moderate and some Palestinians have countered that coming to a dialogue

group is a way to assuage Jewish guilt and to normalize the situation.

However, this group responds in advice to Palestinians about having their

stories heard:

What I try to tell them is, if you want your story to be heard, not just you personally, but if you want people to know who the Palestinians are and what they're experiencing, if you think that the Jews are going to get it by not meeting you, they're not going to read about it, they're not going to watch a

movie about it, they don't care. If you want them to care about who you are and the plight of your people, you have to come and have them get to know you, who you are as a person, and this is really hard work, and it doesn't mean normalization, and if you think the Jews feel comfortable sitting in a circle listening to you tell stories, confronting them, and decisions being made on behalf of their people, it's not a comfortable thing for them, it's not normal, it's difficult. …the Palestinians who participated have had a big voice, because they've been on panels, they've been on TV, they've been interviewed, on radio, talk shows, they're given opportunities that they never had before they participated in this dialogue.

So, telling of stories has both personal and political impact. And the telling of

personal stories never really ends:

Since the group has gone on so long, and we have new members, and there's been a change over, there's this new story that's coming on to the scene, and recently we've had several young men who are students who have come in from Gaza who had very powerful stories that they've shared about losses with their family and everything.

Those kinds of stories really keep bringing the group back to the reality of what it is we're there to talk about. And there's so much news every day that everybody is so invested in this, that they come to those meetings with it on their heart.

As L (husband) says: Listening to another and telling your own story does not

always mean that you will become best friends -- you may or may not--but

you're going to get your voice heard. And that is powerful.

Psychological Safety

In a group interview, the members of the Living Room Dialogue were in

agreement that the dialogue group had become a "safe place" where they

could share their stories knowing that they would be listened to with respect.

The members muse on how that safe place was created:

One group member observes: "Nobody's trying to change anyone's mind about anything…we all have the same interests….we may disagree on certain things, but the fundamental root of it all is the same. We want peace, we view each other as human beings…so it's not intimidating…I think that creates the safe feeling, where you're not going to come into a hostile-feeling environment. You're not going to get attacked by your fellow members."

Another goes on to say: "When things get heated, we return to the guidelines, making sure that everyone has their say. You get to say your bit and then listen as best as you can."

A third voice chimes in: "For me, what makes it safe is that we all come here with the same intention, that there's one focus, that we're here to get along, to listen and that intention means that nobody is going to come here and try to change you or to harm you or to anger you intentionally. Things can happen, but everyone is here for the same reason."

Another member adds to that: …*we're not here to talk somebody into thinking, taking on our perspective, but I certainly would hope that the outcome of the dialogue like this would be that they would expand their thinking, that it opens our minds to being much more inclusive of another perspective, and that they would be able to take it in and think about it and see the truth about it. …So, in a way I would say, I would like to see all of us be able to change our minds to the degree that when we leave a meeting like this, we act differently; we interface with other people in a different way, that we're open to having new kinds of friends and new ideas…*

The safe place is where people can try on new ways of thinking, begin to challenge stereotypes and identify obsolete assumptions. The safe place is where shift can happen.

Too Safe?

The flip side to a safe place and perhaps one of the pitfalls of any group, is the danger of the "too safe."

One of the members reflects: *Sometimes I don't feel comfortable asking certain questions in the dialogue group because I sometimes think that the group goes out of its way to nurture and infuse the Palestinians with love and warmth and compassion. …And I think it has had a good effect, but I've seen them get to the point where there might have been a slight bit of maybe overcompensation because some of the things the Palestinians say are really short sighted …One time I said, "if there weren't suicide bombers there wouldn't be a wall." And one of the Palestinian members – he was also the host - was so angry he was shaking and shouting "I want my house back." Someone poured him a scotch and then the topic was dropped and just smoothed over. It was never discussed further.*

Complacency, a tendency to avoid conflict and a desire to placate members are an inherent part of group dynamics. The question of whether the dialogue is less effective as a result remains open.

Socializing

And yes, we have our social times, too, for sure, and we have our celebrations, and in December, we have our season of light party, and we do potluck and have a good time. Some people are friends. Some Jews are better friends with Palestinians than they are with fellow Jews, and vice-versa.

There are personalities there and different age groups. There are Jewish people who have little kids that are friends with Palestinian people with little kids, that kind of thing.

Community Activism and Branching Out

The Living Room Dialogue Group eventually turned to activism and became

more externally focused, but this occurred only after more than two years of

remaining internally focused on dialogue and on telling personal stories.

And we got to a point where we said, well, we've really been learning a lot from each other. We should do something more public. So, we had a big public event. We got the senior citizens center in the neighborhood and had a big room and we all took responsibility for inviting friends and to tell people what we were doing, and I think about eighty to a hundred people came, and they were curious, and we had a round table set up, and we had questions, and some of us spoke and said what the dialogue had meant to us and why were doing it, and its purpose, and then people at the table had an experience, and from that, I think another group spun off, and then we said, oh, now we have more than one living room dialogue.

Another member recalls:

When we walked into the Jewish community senior citizen center we thought we were wasting our time. These people were elderly we thought "they are closed, they're at the end of their lives, they aren't open to hearing us. But then Elias (Palestinian member) told his story so beautifully and people started sitting up, no one was sleeping…and at the end one elderly Jewish woman came up and gave him some flowers and another woman came up and said. You know when I came in here, I was seeing all of this black and white, she said, now I'm seeing gray. I'm starting to change…"

Another member says: *you can't bring everybody into this dialogue, but we can figure out how to take this experience out into a larger arena so that more people know about it, hear about it and maybe start their own groups. So, that's when at some point we said, it would be great if we could make a movie, some kind of film, so that we could mo del this and wouldn't have to take the people all the time, and especially if we travel someplace else, and especially if we want to have something that we can mail to people in other parts of the country. So, everything just became a process-- And that became the Dialogue in Washington High (DVD film).*

Eventually, at one point, there were a lot of dialogue groups going in the West Town area, maybe ten, and then, some of them lasted for two years or three years and people would feel, after a certain period of time, that they had the experience and they would move on. No one really broke up because they were mad or got angry--most groups don't go on and on and on. Most people kind of feel like they have this experience, and then they don't know what to do with it, and it comes to an end and people go their own ways. Sometimes they sustain their friendships, but right now, there are only two groups that have been going on a long time. Ours, at 16, it'll be 17 years in July, and then there's another one that's been going for ten years. And some other ones that lasted four, five, six years. People move, and life takes them in different directions.

So, there had been a lot of groups, and because of those groups, we'd been invited to do a lot of activities in the schools, to come in and make presentations, and everything that we had done kind of evolved, because when we first started, we would take a panel of people with us. Like, if we would go into a classroom at the university, we would take two Jews and two Palestinians to tell their stories, to be models of how we began by telling our personal narratives in the group, and talk about dialogue and change, and then it got to the point where it got really hard to find people during the week-- most of them worked.

Finally, the group has "branched out" by maintaining a website full of

information.

The group members explain:

We have a website and we have printed materials and models that can be used. We've even expanded what we offer from the living room dialogue, which is just focused on Jews and Palestinians, to others, although that's our working group and where we get the most credibility, where we're the most visible. We also take those dialogue principles now into high schools and colleges where a bigger circle of people are included. There's a bigger circle of people coming, and it won't just be about Palestinian and Jewish issues, but about listening and dialogue and what's needed in every community.

High Profile Recognition

In 1996, those dialogue groups joined together to produce a dinner for 420 interested participants. There were 42 round tables of seating for ten with mixed Palestinians and Jews.

L (wife) recounts:

The electricity in the air was incredible. People came in who had never met the other. The hotel was nervous--do we need security? It was all really tense, but with excitement, and we said, no, we don't need security, it's going to be great, and everybody was so excited, and the context was beautiful, and there was a Jew and an Arab at every table--it was a very coming together kind of atmosphere, and a lot of little friendships developed at those tables, and a new coming together, and that was very exciting, and some dialogue groups spread from that.

L (wife) recollects the behind-the-scenes planning of that event:

It was a big struggle to figure out who might be a keynote speaker because if you invited a Palestinian, will the Jews come? If you invited a Jew, would the Palestinians come? … Then, one of our participants a professor and a teacher, had Dennis Ross' mother in one of his classes, so, he came to the group and he said, actually, we should invite Dennis Ross [at the time the U.S. Ambassador to the Middle East]. We know he's Jewish, but… if we could get him, he would be someone who could attract people to come to the dinner… So, everyone agreed.

 … Well, it turned out, we found out that Dennis Ross was not only going to do the thing at our big dinner at the hotel on Saturday night, then on Sunday, he was supposed to be the keynote speaker for the Jewish Women's Hadassah Hospital dinner. So, he was going to do these two events in one weekend. …But the day before the big dinner, Dennis calls and said I'm not going to be able to come to the dinner because I'm stuck in Lebanon talking to Arafat and Netanyahu, --and I can't come to the dinner.

We kind of expected that to happen,….L is talking to him on the phone, and he says, maybe during the dinner we could call you, and you could do a voice phone thing, and he said, well, that may not work, because I'll probably be on the airplane. And L said oh, where will you be? He said, I'll be flying to West Town. So, L's thinking, he's flying to West Town and can't make our dinner?... he didn't know quite what to make of it, and he said, maybe you could make a recording and play it, and D said, okay, we would do that.

So, L is there having this conversation, and it just so happens that I'm with the S family, our Palestinian participants. We came in and L tells us this story of this conversation he's in the middle of, having with Dennis Ross, and L's desperately running around trying to find a tape that he can get Dennis to say something on right now, and the S family say, you mean to tell me that Dennis Ross can't come to our dinner Saturday night, but he will be in West Town Sunday to do the Hadassah? … that's unacceptable! How are you going to tell the Palestinian community that he was able to make the Jewish thing, but he can't come and be with the Palestinians? He said, if he can't come, we're not coming!

So, L and I were like, oh my God, this was just such a horrible situation. Here's all these people--we have this waiting list coming to this dinner, it's a big deal, and we have this thousand dollar down payment and we don't get it back--what are we going to do?

So, L and I said, wow, this wasn't something that we had really thought--we thought if he can't come, he can't come, and you just swallow it and that's the way it is. Aham said no, it's unacceptable. He has to do something about it. So, we called Dennis Ross back on the phone, and instead of L getting his little recording, they put me on… I said, listen, Dennis, this is a problem here. If you come to Hadassah but you can't make this dinner with the Palestinians, you are going to lose face with the whole community. They are going to be so upset, that is just so telling of the way things are going.

It just took him aback--he said, what do you want me to do? What can I do about it? I said, you better think of something, because this is going to destroy your image in the Middle East, with the Palestinians, if this gets out, and believe me, it will.

So, we said, if you can't come Saturday night, then you have to be able to be available for whomever can come back to the hotel Monday morning to meet with you at that time instead. He said, but I was flying out Monday morning at 8 o'clock! I have a meeting in Washington! And we said, you better change it. This is really important. So, he said, okay, I'll hang up and I'll see what I can do and I'll call you back.

About ten minutes later he called back and said, okay, I changed my schedule, I hear what you're saying, I'll come and meet with you at the hotel on Monday morning after the Hadassah thing before I fly back to Washington. So, we said, okay, and that's what we did. We had the dinner Saturday, RY was our MC, and our keynote speaker. He was perfect, it was non-political, it was for both peoples equally, it couldn't have been better, and then Dennis came back on Monday morning and a hundred people came back from the dinner and we met with him and he gave a talk and we gave him a little plaque and it was perfect--everybody got what they wanted.

But it was a real learning, because L and I, by ourselves, would have accepted the fact of what he said. We wouldn't have been bold enough or creative enough to see that it was not the right thing.

They hadn't realized how important the event was and especially how significant this was for the Palestinians because he was coming to speak to both peoples. They learned the importance of the dialogue group as a symbol for both peoples. And also realized the importance of what they were doing.

As L (wife) says: "L (husband) and I learned a lot about the Palestinians and how they viewed it, and we also learned the value of speaking up. So, Dennis Ross was a big wig, so? What we were doing was really important."

Powerful Moments: signing the peace document, recruiting members, community outreach

In answer to the question of what were some of the highlights of being part of the dialogue, the group mentioned several powerful moments:

L begins:

There have been definite steps along the way, very powerful moments. I think the first most powerful moment, besides the seminar itself, was the signing of the framework for a public peace process in front of everybody at Stanford. That was a very exciting moment to feel like we were part of history.

L continues*: And then starting a dialogue group was a struggle, but the most exciting and emotional moment was when the six Palestinians came in, and I had worked so hard to plead to get them there, that when they came in there, I burst in tears--they probably thought I was a nut! I started crying, oh! I can't*

believe you're really here! That was the beginning of a real core of great people to keep the dialogue group going.

Other group members recall: And then, when we had our first big outreach at the senior citizens center. The day before that event took place was when Baruch Goldstein [perpetrator of the massacre of 29 Palestinians in Hebron in 1994] shot a lot of Palestinians. And so, we thought, oh my God, nobody's going to want to come, or if they come to this event, there's going to be so many feelings, they're going to be so angry, hurt, hostile--can we deal with it? Should we have it? We didn't know whether to postpone, and it was at that point that we said, this dialogue group is not going to go up and down with the news. We are going to stick together no matter what, because that's the problem. When bad things happen, people just give up and go home, and we are not going to do that.

So, we made a decision as a group to go ahead with that first big outreach event where those 100 people were coming, and we did, and nobody talked about it. I mean, that's not why people came. They came to have this dialogue experience. Nobody made a big scene, there was nothing threatening, we didn't have to have police. That was a big decision we made, and it was a really good insight, about not packing our bags and going home.

Another highlight:

The dinner for 420 was certainly a huge decision, event, and working together, and the whole thing, that struggle with D Ross was such a big deal, and we had projected so much on him and who he was and who we were and who we weren't.
And all along the way, because this is so grassroots and so--it's just been kind of evolving on its own, and we keep learning just by trial and error and not going to classes necessarily, but just what's been working, what people respond to, so there have been lots of new things that we have tried that have been very exciting, like going onto campuses and doing these panel presentations. The first time we did those, it was fantastic. We felt really good about it.

We started getting invited to the Jewish Havuras and working with big groups of Jewish students from college campuses and we felt really good about that, because it meant that the Jewish community gave us consent even though we work with Palestinians, they saw we worked with both peoples equally and that we could be trusted and we weren't going to do things or say things to the students that would be destructive or harmful in some way of who they were, and how the Jewish community sees them—

For one member, witnessing a shift occur in another was a powerful moment:

One of the things I'm thinking about is when Elias was invited to come to the dialogue group by another Palestinian who was in the group, and said, now Elias, there's this dialogue group going on right down the street, you could walk to it. Do you want to participate? And his first thought was, absolutely, I am going to go in there and tell those damn Jews what they did to me. So, his purpose in coming was to tell everybody about his pain and to blame and get angry and to finally be heard. And then, as he says what he realized is, what he heard was another half of the story, and he feels like his story is more complete now, and it doesn't take away his pain necessarily, but it helps him understand another frame of reference or life experience that he didn't have a clue about.

Conclusion – We know we're making a difference

As L (the husband) says: You can't keep breathing in; you have to begin to breathe out. He goes on to say eloquently: The more you're in dialogue the more you discover who you are. Because new levels keep coming up, in the community, in the individual, in your emotions, and when you experience emotion, you become alive. So there are new layers every time we reveal ourselves. We're going to do this [dialogue group meeting] as long as we feel we can do it, and it adds up, and we have something to help push along and keep going, and even if something happens to us – we've made a difference here.

Chapter 5: The Story of the North Town Group

A dialogue group provides a unique opportunity that doesn't usually occur in daily life. As Deetz and Simpson assert: "Although participation in dialogues along the "genuine conversation" mode is possible, such opportunities are relatively rare because of the limitations that daily life imposes both on ourselves and others. Rarely is an experience so powerful that the disciplines, routines of life, and ordinary ways of seeing are spontaneously overcome…"

(Deetz and Simpson, p. 147). This North Town group dared embrace this powerful experience. This is their story.

The North Town group has attained celebrity status because of a documentary film that one of the members of the group produced about the group. The twelve women - half Palestinian, half Jewish - have been meeting now for about nine years. This is the story of how a group of women overcame the ordinary way of seeing and created a genuine conversation. As one member of the North Town group put it: "we have shifted our points of view, at least on the emotional level, but consensus is not what we're after." (L-AA). This recognition - that consensus is not the objective of the group - has proven to be perhaps a key theme (perhaps, paradoxically) in uniting the group.

For an understanding of how this group formed and what elements went into its formation and its texture, here is a look at some highlights including the founding of the group, the first retreat, the trip to Israel, a controversy that erupted in the group (not the only one but one example) and the making of the film.

The Founding of the North Town Group

Many of the group members had been in earlier groups that had fallen apart. Questions such as what makes a group work and why do some groups succeed and others fail are central to this work.

Before the North Town Group I was in a dialogue group in which there were mostly American Jews and former Middle Eastern Arabs, but there were also Arab-Americans who had never lived there and there were Israelis who were here studying. And it was men and women. It was a good group, but there were lots of tensions and it wasn't a dialogue group, it evolved more into a discussion group where people's political views could be argued with. And so it had a different aim. I think the hope was that we would come to some consensus or mutual acceptance. The mutual acceptance came easily, but that didn't' mean that our political views were accepted by one another. Personally, interpersonally, we were all friends. And apparently it fell apart a few months after I left the group because of the lack of clarity as to the aim of the group…Because I asked someone later, why did it fall apart? Well we couldn't' even come to an agreement on the Territories.

So for that reason we (North Town Group) would never fall apart because of profound differences like that. It would be part of the material that we would work with. …(L).

One of the Jewish members remembers:

W and H (two Palestinian women) and I had been in a previous group that had fallen apart. We hadn't been dialoguing. And people were there to convince the Other that they were right. There was really no coming together. But I loved it.

To some, convincing the other and achieving consensus appears to be the object of joining a dialogue group. In contrast, L tells of the sense of "magic" in the North Town group which she and the others feel was present even from the early days. Her evocative metaphor of the North Town group as an oasis in a desert is powerful.

I became part of this peace group in [North Town], once again it had sort of a disproportionate amount of Jews involved. But we weren't looking at the Israel-Palestine stuff, we were looking at trying to create a space for constructive dialogue. We actually reached out to the Mosque,… not realizing – because we were ignorant – that the Mosque in the Midwest is not primarily Arab! Most Muslims in this country are not Arab… And then because of my involvement in the North area committee for Peace, someone who had been a longtime good friend of mine said there are women in the social action committee of my Temple who are saying we should have a Jewish-Muslim dialogue. Would you be interested in being a part of this? …In the aftermath to 9/11 a lot of the Palestinians in town were looking for an opportunity to dialogue because they felt that the whole Palestinian issue had gotten kind of

lost. They were the people who were drawn to the North Town group

mostly…secular, a lot of them are Christian. The North Town group is Arab-

Jewish, but of the Arab women, initially all of the Arab women were

Palestinian but then there was a woman who French-Algerian who wanted to

join, and then another woman who was of Lebanese – Syrian heritage, she

came too. …..what felt different about the North Town group was that –

maybe because it was right after 9/11 and there was some kind of an

emotional opening, people felt something had to happen differently. And a lot

of women who were older, who had more experience…and people didn't want

to be "right" – we wanted to be together. There was a longing and a hunger. It

felt like I had been in the desert and learned how to survive in really arid

conditions and then suddenly, there was water, and there was food. And it

was the energy there was so nourishing. ….In some ways it was there from

the start. Initially we thought we were going to meet once a month. And very

shortly – maybe after a couple of times of meeting, we decided to meet every

other week and then we would meet in between too, we'd get together for

lunch or we'd go to the movies…(L)

I (Jewish member) also talks about the early days and about how the group

was formed:

…then a woman came from Israel to America who knew my daughter in Israel

and we invited her to North Town to tell us about the situation, women, Arab

and Jewish women. …she came to my house and I had an open house and

just invited friends I had…And so she said you ought to really do something here in North Town, there are Muslims and there are Jews and we all have to do something. And so she was the inspiration in a sense. And then I called W because we hadn't been in touch in ten years. And we had a meeting with L and M and W and myself and there was a question of who would join and then W knew some Arab women and we knew some women who would be interested …It was just people we knew. There was a group of four women, L, B, and SG and we had coffee a few times. We talked about forming a group. Also all four of us were on the social Action Committee of our Temple and it was after 9/11 and in the Temple there were discussions, could we do something with the Mosque in town, can we bring the two communities together….and then we watched a video of a dialogue group. Actually the Ts gave us a video and we watched it and we saw that the men did all the talking. And we said this is going to be a women's group. So we decided we wouldn't do it as part of the Temple. We'll do it on our own. L, Le, B and myself were the Jewish women. And M. Then there was W. and then she asked H…We didn't have any formula, we didn't know. I think that the fact that the group was so cohesive and that such bonding has occurred, I think it's magic. I don't think you can explain it. It just happened.

When I (Jewish member) first called W about starting another group she defined it as Muslim-Jewish. But W is not Muslim. The North Town group was never meant to be a religious group devoted to religious issues. W recalls:

All of the Palestinians [in the North Town Group) are immigrants, we all have accents and all had first connection to the land, to the issue…I experienced 67 (the War) and Ida was Jerusalemite…Being a Palestinians brings on a lot of pain, … so the identities of everyone in the rooms, I mean all the Palestinian women are so different, but also the Jewish women – not religious, not that but very Jewish. [that was a revelation for her].

The first meeting actually had two Palestinian women because I had invited another friend of mine, who after a couple of years of the group decided she couldn't stand it, it is slow, people are dying we're wasting our time and not getting results and she wanted to push for a more familiar, black and white thing signing resolutions, signing initiatives and that got us into a lot of soul searching, of what kind of group we want to be and how would we be different from any other group and if we were going to be signing this and that, how are we different from other activists? What do we want to be? (W)

The importance of a slow pace, of not rushing to activism, seems to have been another key feature in the formation of this group. M, who acted as facilitator for the group describes some of the components that made the group cohesive. She describes how the focus was not on politics or issues but on the "existential" issues of self and other.

…I think it's very different when you have a dialogic conversation that's really focused on an issue, where there's a lot of politics involved and positions, versus when you're dialoguing about something existential… Something where you're talking about a concept and bringing in your meaning-making and your own personal examples... It's easy for that kind of conversation to get into sort of a discussion for example on two state vs. one state solution in the Middle East, the pros and cons, making distinctions, breaking things down, talking about the pros and the cons. Those are all elements of a discussion. Not that you can't have a good discussion, but it's not the same as dialogue.

… because really the purpose of dialogue is that you get to some sort of new understanding. In a sense, dialogue is a learning conversation. Now, of course you can have a discussion where you learn something, right? Because I could learn some history from you or somebody else, things I don't know, and that can certainly inform my thinking… Some people in the group wish we would discuss the current events more. But I think, well, what's the purpose of discussing that current event. . I am probably one of the few who is sort of biased in not doing that. I feel like, what's the point of it? We all basically have the same values, we all think what's going on is horrible. I'm never really quite sure what the purpose of that is, but maybe it's just--some people do want it.

I think there are some people who want a place to feel supported in an event and kind of the emotions that get aroused.

Facilitation

The North Town group rotates facilitation among the members of the group, as M explains: We rotate, but I'm sort of a default person if nobody really feels like doing it, and I'm happy to do it most of the time, but I encourage other people to do it as well."

M continues

"…I didn't really see myself as being THE facilitator. I really positioned myself as, look, I do have some things I can share with you that could be helpful, and I'm not going to be THE facilitator. But I think that some level of understanding of the process and some facilitation is essential. And I was exposed to Native American traditions and the circle with the talking stick--which is really a vehicle for dialogue."

Interesting that although M, the facilitator, - a Jewish woman - was also a group member, she and the others felt that she could maintain an objectivity because her Jewish identity was not at the forefront for her and because her interest was as she puts it:

"…first and foremost dialogue, and secondarily as a Jew. … I wouldn't say I have the same visceral connection to the conflict that a lot of people have,

although I understand and abhor it intellectually, but I don't have the same

visceral connection to it." (M).

Later, when she discusses her own shift, M says that her identity as a Jew was strengthened as a result of her experience in the North Town Group.

One of the Palestinian members reinforces M's words saying:

She's Jewish but Israel really means nothing to her, and she's not attracted to Zionism and she's never been over there. She's American in every sense of the word and was uninterested in politics. She was interested in the process, which helped us tremendously, because her buttons were different than ours, so she kept us calm (as described by W).

M recalls the initial resistance to process that the group expressed. She had told the group:

I do have some professional expertise in terms of group process and facilitation, and I think there is some methodology here that would be useful, because it would support us in terms of group process, and a couple of people were resistant, and B would definitely say she was one of them, and it was so funny, because she was like, gulp, group process, no! …but after a while she began to see the value in it."

Personal Storytelling

With M's gentle direction, the group spent time connecting, telling personal stories, allowing the group's relationships to build and strengthen. M relates:

One of the things I do as a facilitator is to sort of give the group permission to slow down in the first year and to not feel compelled to take action. We spent a long time just sharing stories. Easily a year. And yeah, and there were some tensions about, well, in particular, there was one woman who isn't in the group now but she was more action-oriented, and she was more like, I don't see the point in talking. We should be out there doing action. She left, but you know, not on bad terms or anything.

Sharing stories – to reiterate the West Town group – is a key feature in relationship building in this group as well.

Powerful Moments: The Retreat, the Co-op, The Israel/Palestine Trip, The Film

One of North Town's most powerful moments was their first group retreat in which they spent a long weekend secluded as a group to bond and to establish their group identity. M describes the first retreat and discusses how instrumental the first retreat was to defining the North Town group:

I can't remember how many months we'd been meeting before we did a retreat, and I really framed it as sort of a strategic planning retreat, and I basically walked them through a simple strategic planning process, where we went through the exercise of coming up with a vision and with a set of guiding principles, which are important to us. We did a vision, but the vision is an

ever-moving thing, so it's not like something we hold onto, really. We defined a mission. We actually do have a mission, vision, guiding principles, core values...

Another member of the group recalls:

Another peak moment for me was the first retreat when we had been meeting for quite a few months and then we decided to get together and look at what people had in common, what our positions are, and we sat there and we kind of outlined and worked hard and guiding the group through this and allotting time for this and that and then we came to the point talking about positions and we decided it best to keep that up until the end, because this is where we figured the fighting was going to come out, so we allotted an hour and a half to that discussion and in the end it took only maybe ten or fifteen minutes. Wow! …It really allowed us to open up from that point. We were able to see the alignment of values that we shared that we were grounded in.

The vision of the North Town group was re-visited and then reinforced in subsequent annual retreats. In M's words:

Then, we came up with some sort of strategic objective, which were more project focused, and again, we sort of did that the first couple years [at the retreats]. Then at one point we broke into committees, you know, and then we got really bogged down with committees and committee reports, you

know--we exist in this sort of nebulous territory of, well, we don't really want to be an organization, but people want to have some visibility. The community knows we exist now and we get called up for certain things. There's always this slightly uneasy sense of, well, who are we? Nobody really wants to be a formal organization, and yet it's not just a group of women that gets together, because we actually do something, like public speaking, that sort of thing.

So, we've done an annual retreat. We revisit our goals, where we're at, how we're feeling about the group. Basically, as a facilitator, I look at, and sometimes I really take on that role and other times I really don't. But there are times when I have said, well, okay--I just try to keep an awareness of the process, and what we are doing, how it is working. We were meeting once a month, and we decided it wasn't frequent enough and went to twice a month, and then we thought we were avoiding dialogue and people kept saying we were just doing business stuff, and so then we said, at every meeting we're going to do a dialogue, so we just kind of noticed what's happening in the group.

The retreat united the group in a shared sense of values. However, the cohesiveness does not preclude differences and contrasts among the members and does not erase the feelings of group belonging as the next episode in the North Town group story demonstrates.

The Story of the CO-OP.

In contrast with the sense of connection that arose from the first retreat, the story of the Co-op is one of controversy in the North Town group.

One of the Arab members of the group explains the story of the Co-op from her point of view:

There is a people's Co-op and there was a vote put forth to have the Co-op boycott Jewish [Israeli] products or not. I felt that it was a no-brainer, sending a message, and taking a stand, and saying OK [we should support the boycott]…not that it's going to hurt the Israeli economy…but I felt it's the message, and it's the moral stand that we take. And yet I found that some of the Jewish sisters voted against the boycott. ….And their explanation, which I still have to pursue - because that's a very good dialogue issue - was that the people who put forth the proposal were extremists….I feel what Israel is doing to the Palestinians is immoral and we need to take a stand on that. … And I'd really like to talk about that. And then (sigh) – I don't think we'll give up. I don't think I will give up. Because I really, I really have made a connection with these women. I would want to talk more and keep working with them to see why they don't see that…And I really have the feeling that if you put it right down to that, they might be on the same side I am. (H).

One of the Jewish members here represents the stance of many of the Jewish members:

I (Jewish member): *Not all North Town group members are members of the co-op, but that doesn't matter, you can take a position whether you have a vote or not. And it pretty much broke down that in North Town group all the Arab women voted for it. And not all the Jewish women voted for it. Not all the Jewish women voted against it. …all of us are agreed on the intent of the boycott. Even though it's strictly symbolic [since its small scope could not possibly impact Israel's economy], it wouldn't have any effect. It's minute. The intent is not the question. It's the method and the process. And H said – what's happening over there is morally wrong and we have to have the courage of our conviction. But then I said but I also voted with the courage of my conviction, but my conviction is another conviction. It's not that the intent is wrong. But to me, the North Town group is peacemaking. That's what I am in the North Town group for, that's my main goal. So we can bring people together and boycotting gets people further apart, and there's hostility and intimidation…but aside from that the way I think about the conflict is that it is really a wound. And my role is to heal the wound, and I can't vote for the boycott. So then what actually came up from the other women is we want to do something positive, we want to get the co-op to sell the olive oil from the West Bank, that's what we are trying to work on now. So leave the Israeli products as is, but add some of the Palestinian products to help the economy over there. So that's peacemaking. But boycotting really isn't.*

The group all agreed that despite the controversy, they could continue to meet and to dialogue. They felt that it didn't create animosity. Hurt and pain are inevitable, but remaining in the dialogue is essential.

W's take: *I must admit that the boycott still bothers me, because I just don't understand how can people as compassionate and as loving and as human as you [the others in the group] be against the boycott? I understand what they are saying and I understand that they felt that it was strategic that this is polarizing to the community and they're trying to bring the community together, but I said some things are more important and you have to stand up and it is the boycott. Well, I boycott items coming from the settlements, but I don't boycott Israel…why is it okay to put sanctions on the Iraqi people or on the Iranians because of their governments but not okay to put sanctions (i.e. the boycott) on the Israeli people because of the policies of their government? …as an individual I have to say I have a personal boycott. I don't buy Israeli stuff. It's just not comfortable for me to do that. I don't know what comes from the settlements and I don't know…but I'm not purchasing that…Whether we do it or not [the boycott] is not as important as being able to have a conversation about it and be able to face ourselves…I know morally that what Israeli is doing is wrong, and I know that if you talk to a lot of Israelis, even if they're not active, they tell you it's wrong. I know a lot of Jews say that. Where do we take that and stand up and say, no is no.*

M discusses how the controversy was eventually resolved:

Well, I think it was difficult. It was difficult for the Arab women. It was difficult - I do remember--there were definitely some painful feelings. I wouldn't say it had a lasting impact, at least that I'm aware of. Maybe there is some residue, but none that I'm aware of….It was talked about, yeah. I'm sure there were questions that were raised that haven't been addressed. I'm sure that's true. Could it be picked up again? I'm sure it could. …

It addressed the level of, what is effective action, and because it was so local, was it really going to make a difference and what the meaning of it was for them, why they were for it, why they weren't for it, and the thing is, I guess it actually did get resolved, because they wrote a letter to the board of the Co-op…Leonore wrote the letter with some input from others--it was some way of bringing to resolution the divisiveness and polarization that had occurred…. We sent a note encouraging the Board [of the Co-op] in some way to ….find sort of balance…

The group was able to find a unified voice in that. But I think that was sort of the resolution of it for us, the writing of that letter. .. Probably the boycott was the last time there were some really strong differences of opinion. I think the thing with that, it was in some ways very significant because we were able to talk about the differences of opinion. There were some people who were like,

why weren't the Jews supporting the boycott, and talking about their

disappointment. I think it was very notable for the fact we were able to each

be present with what we really thought or felt.

… it's basically not about changing minds. I think that's one of the hallmarks

of the chemistry of our group, and maybe that's what makes it dialogue. We

don't try to change anybody's mind. The boycott was more like, this is my

position, and how come you don't have that position? I think mostly we don't

stay on the level of positions, because we kind of realize that those don't

really prove to be very fruitful conversations.

The Israel/Palestine Trip

In contrast to the controversy around the Co-op boycott, the Israel trip was

both unifying and divisive to the group. Only five members of the group of

women traveled together – three Jewish women and two Palestinian women.

The comments made by the women demonstrate how different the reactions

were to the trip. One of the members recalls the excitement surrounding the

trip:

Oh it was amazing, it was an incredible experience. To do it together. Well,

first of all I think traveling with another person or group is a pretty amazing

thing, because you're together all the time. So that in and of itself is enough.

But we spent a long time defining what we wanted to do, what we wanted to

accomplish. And developing an agenda and we took turns in making

connections with different organizations that would be helpful. It's a bonding

experience to go on a trip like that.

However, since the experience was not shared by everyone, the trip created a shift in dynamic for the group:

The people who were left – first we thought we would try to email them and

keep in touch and tell them what we did. But we couldn't do that, we couldn't

find ways of doing that. And then when we came back, one thing that was

very good, is they sort of organized a homecoming for us, where we all talked

about it. But it did kind of cause some sort of division. Not formally. But the

film then kind of brought us back together. …

The trip evoked powerful emotions in some of the travelers:

W: I don't think we've been as normal since the trip. The trip has been so

traumatizing, at many, many levels. Part of it is our almost impotence in being

able to make a difference. Why are we doing this to each other? Watching the

land? Have you crossed to see the wall from the other side? …And so we

came back really traumatized by this idea of this ownership, how, if [the

Israelis seem to be saying] if I can't have it, I'm going to destroy it. And then

you look at the wonderful Palestinian people, just smiling and I say, what are

you smiling about? And all these people are trying to have their life apart from

Israel, apart from the Occupation, they're taking care of their kids and having

plays and theater and then you go, God, I love humanity and the resilience of humanity and then you go to meet with some Israelis whose anger is hard for even me to take…

L: something got jolted in that trip. …every once in a while something would happen on the trip where I felt that they were refusing to let the Israeli culture enter them. The Arab women refused to eat in an Israeli restaurant…for example, we found ourselves at the bus station in Jerusalem, and there are places to eat there. So we were very hungry …and they just refused. They wouldn't go in and eat with us. They said, it looks good, go ahead in and eat, we'll wait for you. And it was the same with hotels, they did not want to sleep in an Israeli-run hotel. ..that irked me. There was a lack of parity. I actually said at one point during the trip, I thought we were going so that each of us would learn what she needed to learn. Become more aware of what she was ignorant of. And I come here and I see it's all Palestinians, Palestinians…In other words, we're much more open to the experience of Palestinians and more curious about their life than about Israel. And H says, I know Israel. I don't need to learn about Israel. But it made it lopsided, and then when we went to the kibbutz, I felt it was denigrated…the comments were cold and disrespectful. I felt there was a real disrespect. We arrived three hours late, because we ate at an Arab restaurant along the way that was not on the agenda. So we made my friends on the kibbutz wait. And then they wouldn't stay for tea afterwards, and the friend who showed us around really wanted

to, she had prepared cake and so on. They said we were going to be late for

the next item on our itinerary. But I just felt, Israel is always the bad guy and

that there wasn't that openness to my experience as a group member. So

when we came back I think that did disrupt the bond that I had with W. ...

If nothing else, the Israel trip demonstrates the challenges in dialoguing on an

issue so emotionally charged as that of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The Film

The film, produced by filmmaker LW, one of the founding North Town group

members was significant for the group on several layers. It gave them a

project and a shared experience and shared goal and objective but it was

also a strain on the group – two years in the making. It also played a

significant role in gaining recognition in the community for the group and has

brought them very much into a place of activism and empowerment external

to the work they do in the group.

One member recounts:

Well, the film changed the way we functioned. Because whenever there was

a camera we felt that we had to dress, it had an inhibitory affect on what you

say sometimes. Not a lot, but some of the things were kind of staged. In the

end there was a party. Because the film has certain needs, like to you have to

have visual things, it can't always be just always dialogue and talking. And

people were getting really fed up with it, and there was a lot of complaining.
Because this went on for two years!

Some of the members complained but when it was over the final product gave the group a powerful motivation and incentive to continue what they were doing and to reach out to the community.

…they said "we're not the North Town group anymore, we're not doing dialogue anymore, we're getting off track [because of the film]." So there was a lot of complaining. And I remember we had a retreat before the premiere and I felt so sorry for Laurie [the filmmaker] because she was working so hard and there were so many frustrations. And then the premiere. I don't know if you heard about the premiere. ..we were all selling tickets in advance, but we didn't know how many tickets had been sold. And then we filled up the theater! 1700 seats. And 300 people were turned away… because it was filled. And when the director of the Universal Music Society who was MC that night announced onstage – I still choke up when I think about it – he said the North Town theater was full! This hardly ever happens. So it was really incredible. …it was a fabulous evening, there was a reception and a lot of people worked on this and contributed. There was a reception before and then there was the film and people still mingled in the lobby and then there was a restaurant and some of us – most of the North Town group members went there and stayed for hours and hours. And it was pretty amazing and so

there were no complaints after that. And it's still draining us. Because now, with all of the requests for screenings and al the engagements we have, we're only 12 women. …

The film has multiple meaning for the group:

W: The people who are producing the film are looking at it as a product. To me, it is a tool. It is a tool to begin the conversation. It is to engage people, make people start to think to see that we created an environment where we can talk about it, and not kill each other still after five years enjoy one another's being with each other and we've taken a trip to this source of pain and still came back together…So that's the tool for me. But the group that is producing it as a product; they have to get the money back and I understand that, but I can't support the product…there's a conflict here.

Community Activism – Branching Out

The North Town group has become more visible and they feel that their impact is farther reaching than they had originally realized:

Now our major task is education and branching out. Showing the DVD to middle schools, reaching major educational institutions who can then use it. And there's a lot of dialogue activity going on here on campus already…Now we're thinking of starting some sister groups. Giving them the help they need give them more structure, more help or guidance…

Conclusion – It's Unique

One member sums up the experience of being part of the North Town group:

M: All I can say about this group is that … it's unique… The thing that's really interesting to me about this group…, I think we bring different agendas, which is not uncommon in groups. Whether it's a need for personal connection or a forum to talk about painful things, I think there are multiple agendas. Sometimes when we seem like we're just not on a straight trajectory, it's because the group is always trying to accommodate all the agendas. I've never really experienced that before. … --it's just sort of a living organism that finds a path, reshapes itself a little bit... I don't know if other groups are like that, but that's what this group gets right.(M)

The idea of a group as a living organism which seeks and finds its path is an apposite metaphor for the enterprise of a dialogue encounter group.

Analysis of the West Town and North Town groups

As a researcher, my initial reaction to the stories of the West Town group and North Town group were quite different. While I was impressed with the West Town group and felt in awe of their achievements, I found myself more emotionally engaged by the North Town group's stories. My initial reaction to the North Town's co-op boycott was despair. Here was a successful group that had been dialoging at the time for about five years, and yet, there were still issues that arose that divided the group along ethnic lines. What hope could there be for generalizing the success of a dialogue group if even such a cohesive, united group did not erase ethnic lines. Also, as a Jewish researcher, I found myself identifying more with the points of view of the Jewish members on this particularly divisive issue.

After much reflection and discussion with mentors, my attitude gradually changed and I began to see the controversy as a reason for hope. Here were two groups of people with fundamental identity-based differences who never reached agreement on the issues, never persuaded the other group to see things their   way, yet, depite all this, maintained a positive regard and respect for one another and continued to socialize, communicate and dialogue together. Perhaps this is the ultimate metaphor of how to resolve an identity-based conflict.

A look at the research on dialogue might illuminate still further the significance of the conflict in the North Town group and reformat the definition of success of a dialogue group. According to researchers, "…some approaches in social psychology have asserted that intergroup conflict is reduced when there is an emphasis on the commonalities between the groups and a de-emphasis on their differences (Sherif et al, 1961, Gaertner et al, 1999). …This for example, occurs when Israelis and Palestinians are asked to redefine themselves as Middle Easterners. A different line of research and theory has proposed that only a meeting between groups that are fully aware of their own and their adversary's identity can lead to a lowering of intergroup tensions (Wilder, 1984). This approach holds that a constructive intergroup dialogue is one that takes place between separate and clearly demarcated identities. "… [W]hen people have a clear and demarcated in-group identity, they are better equipped to conduct a genuine intergroup dialogue, which in turn is a necessary condition for co-existence between equal social groups. Dialogue in the spirit of this model in fact creates a process that helps participants to solidify their in-group identity." (Nadler, 2000, p. 29).

Thus, in the North Town group the fact that ethnicities still exist and have not been erased can be viewed positively. In addition, the fact that the group remained in dialogue despite such a divisive controversy is even more heartening and actually holds out hope. Differences do not go away but remaining in dialogue, in communication, in compassionate communion is still possible. And that, I believe is the ultimate message of the co-op story. As I

said above, in my initial despair, I made the mistake - which the group understood better than I – that it is not about coming to agreement or finding that common ground, but about shift.

The group is thus a safe place where people can try on new ways of thinking, begin to challenge stereotypes and identify obsolete assumptions. The safe place is where shift can happen. As Deetz and Simpson assert: " ...Dialogic models that favor a quest of common ground inherently favor the already dominant position of institutional privilege. …Calls for coming together and finding common ground de facto reproduce the status quo because the ground that is common between participants is that of the dominant culture. This inhibits rather than supports the radical disruption of self that is central to our productive understanding of dialogue." (Deetz and Simpson, p. 145)

In the North Town group, the controversy surrounding the Co-op demonstrates that the common ground is not necessary for good dialogue, and in fact, as Deetz and Simpson point out, may hinder the generative nature of dialogue and as Nadler reiterates, in order to reduce hatred and prejudice, "instead of trying to erase feelings of group belongingness, one should try to nurture and encourage members to identifty with their respective groups. Only contact between individuals who feel that they belong to a worthwhile and esteemed group is likely to generate less prejudice and hatred toward the other group." (Nadler, p. 26). It is the equality of status between

the member of the different groups and mutual respect that derives from such

equality that can lead to reduction in prejudice and a successful dialogue.

Chapter 6: The East Town Story

In contrast to the very positive transformation and shift outcomes of the North Town group story and the West Town groups, the story of the East Town-based dialogue groups seems to epitomize the pitfalls that can plague all well-intentioned dialogue encounters.

The Founding of the East Town Group

In 2006, Congressman KD from East Town, called a meeting of Jews, Arabs and interested others in his Congressional office. At least 25 people showed up for the first meeting, sat at a big table with the American flag flying behind Mr. D and dialogued on the Middle East conflict

At first we had twenty, maybe even thirty participants and sometimes it was hard to hear because the table we were sitting at was so long because there were so many people there, but I think because of D (local politician)'s involvement and that fact that it was in this formal setting in the Congressional office, people felt it was more of a priority and they came*. (DB)*

One member of the group explains how the dialogue group was initiated:
A number of us were meeting with KD … we had started going down to lobby him but also to work with him and out of that came this group that ended up being called the Middle East Peace Forum that started out as just a dialogue group." (DB)

I have to give credit to KD and ED, (KD's wife) because they started us out. When we first started they were meeting with us every week and they were actively involved in the process, and they were a positive influence, just from being there, but also the way they trying to help…helping each person try to understand other people better. I remember at one point…when KD said he was boiling it down to fear and anger getting in the way of both sides and a lot of times, when there's an argument or issue that comes up that's difficult to deal with, you can almost always boil it down to one side's fear or anger. I still find that to be true in most cases (DB)

The First Meetings

One of the Jewish members describes the "ice-breaker" moment for her at the first meeting:

So, when I was invited to find some peace Jews to come for a dialogue, I was like, great, and so, I called up the ones that I knew and took a van-load of people down to D's office, and my son was in town the day we were going; he came home from his other job an hour before we went and wrote a peace song. I didn't know what he was doing, but he came down and we sat around the table and D opened the thing and said I think we should start out with things we have in common, and what our hopes and dreams are, and everyone was just silent. They were looking at each other, you know, and my son puts his hands up, and I was like, oh my God, because I knew he was

going to sing this song, and he gets up and he sings these words about Israel and Islam coming together, and everybody is listening and D starts to clap, and then everybody is clapping, and the ice was broken, and it was really beautiful.

One of those first participants recalls:

At first we went around the table and everyone talked a little bit about why we were there and what we were doing at the table. The second time, it was ED D's wife who facilitated. She broke us up into our ethnic groups – Jewish, Arab, which of course immediately brought confusion because there was a whole group of American Christians who didn't know where they should be grouped and the Arabs were both Christians and Muslims, so you couldn't just have a Muslim group and a Christian group, but the American Christians didn't really want to be grouped and there was this whole other group of just lefties who didn't want to be in any group – racial, ethnic or whatever.

The participant at the first East Town meeting continues:

But so, the Jews got together. We weren't sure what we were all doing together. Some of us knew each other, but religiously we were all different, secular to orthodox,…very observant or not, etc… So this extra group got formed of "others." And that is important because in the dialogue, there was immediately an attitude that was generated by that group, an idealistic way of looking at things that to be a good human being, unless you're a good citizen

of the world, [and not affiliated with just one group] then you're wrong. That

was the underlying theme that was there.

Another participant describes the experience of being divided into ethnic

groups:

SW: ED, told us to get into your little groups, like, who you are, if you're

Jewish, you know, Arab, or whatever, which, of course, immediately brought

confusion. Am I Arab? You know? And immediately, the Arabs, whether or

not they were Christian or Muslim, wanted to group together, and then this

whole other group stepped forward, said we don't want to be any--they were

Christians, American Christians, and, you know, they didn't really want to be

grouped, I think, and then there was this whole other group of just lefties who

didn't want to be in any group at all…

In an interview with one of the members of the dialogue who was neither

Jewish nor Arab, the participant relates how he was classified as an "other.":

KH: *I'm the "other." But to me, the "others" are kind of interesting…I thought*

we were second class citizens in this, because we don't have primary

experience, so I felt treated like a second-class citizen… I think the Jewish

people, in particular, seemed to want to talk to Arabs and Muslims. We were

kind of in the way. My idea at the end was, that we're all American citizens,

we're in America, our ethnic identities are a second thing that we're very

interested in.

Group Process

Techniques such as Appreciate Inquiry were utilized to try to engender a positive intragroup environment.

And then ED gave us these questions, and one of the questions was an AI [Appreciate Inquiry] question: what would be the best time period of your people. And that actually was a very interesting question, because in our group we were all unanimous in agreeing that NOW was the best time for the Jewish people. And when we brought that back to the whole group, they were shocked. They had this idea that some past time was the glory, the golden age, particularly the golden age when Jews and Muslims were together.

The negative energy that seemed to begin with the grouping into ethnic enclaves, however soon turned to competition among the groups. The Jewish participant continues the narrative:

The other thing was, we were supposed to say things that we were proud of , but that was more difficult, and we didn't present it well and the Muslims came forward and talked about hospitality as so important and education and they just articulated everything so nicely, that I felt bad that we hadn't presented well the Jewish people. It didn't feel good. We weren't together as a group and we were breaking up into these pieces.

Facilitation

Facilitation also became a thorny issue. Many of the participants seemed to agree that the facilitator appointed by KD was not up for the job.

And then there was always this problem of facilitation in the group. It was being moderated by M, who is Jewish and K asked him to do that and the Arabs didn't like that he was the moderator because he was Jewish.

M was a terrible facilitator, that's for sure. …And then we had this other guy – he didn't know anything about facilitating.

The facilitator M – I was always frustrated with him because he didn't seem to notice when people were waving their hand and wanting to speak and it ended up being that people would have to just jump in and say things and then it was just that the loudest voices prevailed, and other people didn't get to talk…and I often never got to speak.

The facilitation improved when others tried their hand at it.
But then we started switching facilitators. Some people were pretty good at it but it was interesting because people were trying different things.

And then I rotated in and became the facilitator and I did a good job. …I came up with a process for us to try to get around what we were doing and the way I did it was, everybody got three votes, stickers of different colors and vote on the topics that you would like to dialogue about….but then people put all their stickers on political action. …Anyway, we didn't have good facilitation.

Dialogue vs. Political Activism

Whereas the North Town group gave itself permission to slow down and to focus internally for the first year or so of their dialogue (although not all the original participants agreed with this approach), some members of the East Town group felt compelled to progress quickly toward political activism:

The tension between dialogue and action is immediately apparent in the East Town group:

And then one of the Arab members – a very articulate guy – put a motion on the table that we needed to have the purpose of our group and the purpose of the group, according to him, was to take political action.

The motion to turn to political activism was not agreed upon by all members of the group and eventually caused the beginning of its disintegration:

So, from the beginning there was this very difficult disagreement about the purpose of the group, which was the Jews had come for dialogue and the other people had come for political action and we never resolved it, and eventually, I left. But for almost a year we met every week for two hours and there was a good showing of people.

Another regular participant remarks:

One of the things that killed East Town group is that, by the second meeting, the same guy J came up with this, we need to make a resolution about what's

going on right now!...And we weren't ready to make a resolution and it

became a conflict…my brother who is in an Israeli – Palestinian group in Los

Angeles said that's the perennial conflict, …the Arabs want action and the

Jews want to talk…(AF)

Another group member recalls:

Well, there were a number of people , probably a majority of the people,

wanted to become more public and become more action-oriented by making

public statements and doing more public demonstrations … it was at a time

where probably the Jewish part of the group wasn't ready for that. (DB)

KH: One of the Arab members - JK - was pushing that we should use some

action over Gaza, and some of the Arab Palestinians wanted, you know, it's a

human rights crisis to the Arabs, and here we're sitting and talking about this

while it's going on, and to them, people are starving and hungry and all that

stuff, the siege of Gaza, so, J (Arab member) was pushing, and Jewish

people said, no, we're here to talk, we're not prepared to act in concert with

you guys.

One of the East Town group members attempted to make a division between
action and dialogue:

My idea was – because I'm an activist – was not to take political action

together. Let's have dialogue here, and then each of us be activists, which we

all are, and then come back and share what we're doing. That could be part

of the dialogue…But we could never get to an agreement about what we were

doing in there.

Controversy

Despite the rocky start, the group continued to attempt to dialogue. However,

the conversation was rife with controversies and misunderstandings. As one

member recalls:

At a certain point, we had established that everybody at the table was for a

two-state solution, but then this simple point I realized that for many people,

the two states didn't include a Jewish state, in that there was such profound

commitment to total democracy that a Jewish state is not something that is

possible.

The controversy surrounding the statements that the group wanted to

compose and issue could not be resolved:

Because the statements and demonstrations were mostly about what was

happening to towns in the West Bank, in Lebanon…and they weren't making

statements about how horrible the suicide bombings were in Tel Aviv…and

the statements being composed were not about Israel's need for security

(DB)

At a certain point, the frustrations in the group mounted to the point that separate factions were formed:

…the Jews did not want to take political action with these other people who weren't committed to a Jewish state. So, at a certain point, I invited all the Jews over to my house, …knowing that when you're taking half the participants of the dialogue, it's not a good process, …but we felt that there was a need for us to talk with each other, so I invited them over and everybody came. Everybody wanted to talk and that is where we came up with four points and brought them back to the group.

But the larger group felt upset and betrayed by the unilateral act of separation into factions:

The other people were like what? The Arabs didn't get together and bring their demands ,.. so it wasn't really that helpful to the dialogue, it was helpful to us, but the whole thing was not a pleasant experience, except for that first day.

E-mail controversy

Many groups have found that attempts to continue the dialogue via email lead to further frustrations and hostilities: *Oh and then there started to be emails going around and people commenting on the emails. It was horrible. We wanted to keep the dialogue in the room…*

Another member recalls how the email controversy led to the brink of serious conflict:

KH: The second thing that happened was, in the middle of this Gaza thing, the emails were flying through this whole period… It was a lot of conflict, and at one point, somebody put in an email about Gaza, JK [Arab member] said that the state of Israel is an oxymoron, whatever that means, and there was soon a reply from MG [Jewish member] that he knows anti-Semitism when he sees it, so, that was an accusation of anti-Semitism, J criticizing Israel was to M anti-Semitic.

But at that point, J went ballistic and said, if you're going to disparage me and my family, there's a lawsuit, and don't call me anti-Semite. Then, we got into the whole debate about what it is to be anti-Semite, and Zionists and non-Zionists, and Arabs have different views about--and, you know, this has been a huge debate about who the anti-Semite is, and what qualifies one. Is that a lame excuse to attack someone who is against Israel? Is it automatically anti-Semitic to be very, very strongly against Israel? Or is it legitimate to criticize Israel as long as you don't express personal hatred or sort of historical hatred toward the Jews? We've been through that!

The email exchanges were vicious and argumentative. Many of the members agree that these emails tore the group apart and many of the Jews left because of the email exchanges.

Shifts – Positives

Although the controversies and conflict abound in the East Town dialogue group, there were also moments of shift and transformation.

Although the East Town dialogue did not act as a vehicle for overcoming differences - certainly the differences remained - the process of exploring the differences was a positive and transformative one for some of the participants.

But I did hear a lot of stories and I learned history I was never taught. I had never heard of Dir Yassin [massacre of Palestinians by Jews in 1948] before. I had heard of the checkpoints but I hadn't hears as many personal stories…hearing someone describing how she had been kicked out of her home, how they lost their home, how they came to America and now can't go back. That was powerful. And eye opening. ..So it made me feel like we really need to know. One of the issues for Jewish people is the information, that I discovered in this process, we want our information Kosher but our need for kosher information has kept us from seeing what's really going on, and it's our crime…because it's not consistent with who we are. …So I felt like we – the Jewish people – really need to get together and move the Jewish conversation forward. So that became a commitment that I made to myself.

Another participant reinforces the positives from the dialogue group experience:

...my experience was that I met a bunch of people whom I had never met before from different sides. I learned a lot, because I felt like I was a novice and a lot of the information, a lot of the history was new to me…I really learned a lot. No, a year and a half later, I'm very into this issue from the programming and organizing side of things, but there is still some dialogue going on because we have people with different points of view that are trying to work together to figure out how we should further this peace. ...

Another participant recalls how honesty and revelation was important:

…One of the most healing times in the dialogue group was when the Palestinians shared the problems within their community – censorship and eavesdropping and a fear of speaking out – this was healing, because it was always Jews coming forward and saying what our problems are, but never anything on the Palestinian side admitting any responsibility for anything ever having to do with this conflict.

Perhaps the most positive moments of the group were the sharing of personal stories:

One of the best things we did at the beginning was a series of go-arounds about everybody introducing themselves to get a personal history of where they were coming from and why there were there and where they came from

and that was a really good part of the process, because it really make it

personal in a way that you can't argue with somebody's experience of their

own history so much…That sharing of personal stories was for me a highlight.

It was very touching for me.

The positives however were outweighed in many of the participants'

experience by the conflict and anger and misunderstandings that arose:

So, my experience has been very positive, but I've also experienced people in

the groups who haven't found it positive, who have found it very frustrating

and who have given up and left the group and gotten really angry, and I think

what has helped me is that I am very much in the middle where I understand

both sides and I understand the need for compromise, so I think that helps

me understand when either side gets very angry or doesn't feel like their side

is being heard as much…the assumption is that because I'm in Peace Action

is that I'm anti-Israel, but I'm not.

These misunderstandings soon led to the collapse of the group.

The Group Falls Apart

So the East Town group just fell apart.

There may be one or two Jews left in it. The only Jew left in that group is DB

who – when we divided up into our ethnic groups – did not come to sit with

the Jews. He did not want to be categorized. He is not a religious person, is

not a member of any synagogue, but he identifies as a Jew. He identifies as a Jew, but does not live as a Jew and he is the only Jewish person left in the group.

DB: It was mostly the Jews dropping out. And my feeling at the time was that the people who were either dropping out or making the process more difficult seemed to be more from their way of doing things, their personality, not so much what they believed… their way of dealing with the disagreement or the difficulty effected whether they started in or how they handled it more than what point of view they were coming from.

So, people were getting stuck on process. But it wasn't only that, the Jews were dropping out of the Middle East Peace Forum because they felt that the majority of the group was not recognizing Israel's needs as much as the Palestinian's needs.

And I stayed because I felt that if I left than the Jewish point of view is not even going to be there, and I think it needs to be there. When I say that I'm pro-Israel is it because I see the need for a Jewish state. Not the way it's working out these days. So, there are people who doubt that I'm pro-Israel because I don't agree with what the State of Israel is doing. And also, I was still learning things from both sides. SO, I stayed.

The leadership of the group which was so instrumental in starting and sparking enthusiasm among the participants began to change its focus. The drop in commitment of the leadership also led to the disintegration of the group:

And some people stopped coming when we stopped meeting there and when the Ds stopped coming because they weren't available.

And then in April D addressed us by phone saying basically that he thought we should take a break for the summer and a lot of us felt like we were being kicked out of his office. By then, we hadn't seen him for several months because he was busy in Washington.

A core group of committed members has remained. About six or seven people from the original 25 still meet periodically. They call themselves the Middle East Peace Forum. There is only one Jew in the group and the others are either Palestinian or committed American Christians. They meet at different venues around town, including CAIR – the Council on American-Islamic Relations.

Conclusion – Debate not dialogue

The East Town group – like so many of these groups - called itself a dialogue group. However, the group found itself pulled in the direction of debate and controversy. As such, it foundered from the start. Despite good intentions,

despite the high motivation resulting from the strong leadership of the group,

the group did not dialogue according to the dimensions of dialogue that I have

compiled. The group remained polarized; they did not suspend assumptions;

they did not listen deeply in the Buberian sense nor were they able to balance

different perceptions. Although they did engage briefly in personal storytelling,

they did not spend enough time to create a psychologically safe space and

therefore did not bond and form relationships and as a result did not create

shared meaning. However, rather than view this as a complete failure, many

in the group felt that they grew from the experience and – if nothing else –

learned from their mistakes.

Analysis of East Town Group

The East Town group spent much time and effort trying to convince the others to see things from their own perspective. Both Gadamer and Habermas emphasize "continual social formation of consensus in interaction beyond the intentions and opinions of the participants….reaching openly formed agreement regarding the subject matter under discussion, rather than on seeking agreement between participant's perspectives." (Deetz and Simpson, p. 146). Thus, in the East Town group they futilely sought agreement on perspective rather than on subject matter.

Gadamer (1975) goes on to argue that the ideal is not "self expression and the successful assertion of one's point of view, but a transformation into communion, in which we do not remain what we were" (p. 341). This did not happen in the East Town group. One of the participants of the East Town group describes the emotional blocks that prevented members of the group from communing and finding compassion, ultimately leaving them entrenched in their original positions.

Emotional blockers – we all have them, because we align ourselves with our 'side," our team and then we put up emotional blocks to hearing the other side. We all have emotional blockers that prevent us from communion with the other side. For Arabs, when you mention the Holocaust, the popup emotional block screen is automatic: why should we have to pay? It's like a pop us screen. It pops up as soon as you say the word Holocaust. "it's a

horrible thing, why should we have to pay for that? It had nothing to do with us. ..We treated the Jews fine in all our Arab countries…We need a pop up blocker.

The same participant recalls how he himself, despite his understanding of the futility, attempted self expression and assertion of his side in what he thought was a rational, balanced manner:

I made a presentation – I gave them specifics, some facts about massacres that have happened over the centuries in Arab countries, and about how Jews were treated in second class ways in their countries – they absolutely did not get it at all. …

In retrospect, he understood that re-stating the facts just caused "blocks" which constrained communion instead of fostering it. He recalls with regret the missed opportunity for true dialogue: *That's why I'm fascinated with the idea of dialogue as a way of getting around just giving the facts. Facts are fuel for debates…I should have known that.*

According to researchers, "the theoretical and practical approaches to work involving meetings between groups in conflict are characterized by two major axes:

Individual Orientation   Group Orientation

Continuum 1: human relations..………….conflict resolution

Continuum 2: contact hypothesis………..intergroup encounter

In human relations workshops, the main emphasis is on the psychological aspects of the encounter experience. The goal of this approach is to emphasize what participants have in common and to relegate conflictive subjects to the sidelines. Conflict resolution workshops, in comparison, assume that there is a basis in reality for the conflict between the two groups and that resolving it requires a search for ways to build bridges between the disparate goals of the two groups. This approach emphasizes seeing the participants as representatives of their respective groups, with less emphasis on their inner psychological world and on their interpersonal relations (Abu Nimer, 1999).

In the East Town dialogue, the approach used was clearly one of conflict resolution as the participants were grouped into their respective cultural and religious groups. Despite best efforts to initiate a conflict-resolution approach, the group was immediately suffused in a negative energy.

This type of divisiveness and discordance can be understood through the lens of Social Identity Theory. In this type of encounter, the members were not seen as individuals but as representatives of a group which leads to psychologically defensive behavior obstructing real dialogue. The members of each group were not allowed to just "be themselves" and express their own

uncertainties and ambiguity, thus psychological safety – one of the keys to a successful dialogue – was not truly established. When psychological safety is present, members can speak freely and it becomes a positive that a member of a group is seen as both an individual and as a representative or his or her social group.

Action vs. Talk

All three groups addressed the question of when to stop talking and when to begin acting. This is a question that arises sooner or later in every dialogue group. According to the Arab-Jewish Dialogue Support Network compiled by the Center for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking at the University of Minnesota, which sees itself as "a first attempt at cataloguing the groups throughout the U.S. and internationally," it is perhaps no surprise that the East Town group, got bogged down in the tension between dialogue and action.

According to the survey conducted by the Support Network: Among the biggest challenges groups have faced include: 1) the tension between dialogue and action; 2) the inadequacy of the dialogue process for many Palestinian members to address the critical issues of the conflict or to lead to political action; 3) the resulting lack of interest in initial or continued attendance among Palestinians; 4) inadequate group leadership, both in providing organizational leadership and facilitation skills; and 5) difficulties in accommodating new members of the group.

The Dialogue Guide of the Arab-Jewish Dialogue Support Network attests that the tension between dialogue and action experienced by the East Town group is all too common:

> *Many Arab/Jewish dialogue groups report that a major challenge is the tension that exists between dialogue and action. Some groups are divided because some members want to engage in political action while others don't. Some say that the dialogue process itself is the action while other participants say that dialogue is necessary but not sufficient to engage them in the process. There is a sense of urgency among many participants to act because of the terrible events taking place daily in Israel/Palestine and because of the frustrations surrounding failed peace efforts. Another concern related to discussing the issues is that people feel powerless to do anything about them. Some feel that people in a living room dialogue are engaging in an academic exercise because only Israelis and Palestinians are in a position to resolve the conflict."*

There are suggestions in the Dialogue Guide for resolving this common tension:

> *Some groups have resolved this issue by splitting into separate dialogue and action groups. Others have evolved from dialogue to*

action groups, while groups have derailed because of the tension

between dialogue and action. Some groups feel compelled to initiate

public education activities when they reach common understandings

and perspectives. Action is often a compelling next step after sustained

dialogue, and indeed, many dialogue and deliberation processes lead

to collective action. Both the National Issues Forum and the sustained

dialogue process developed by Harold Saunders of the Kettering

Foundation incorporate the development of scenarios to take into the

political arena.

Some other suggestions offered by the Guide:

Action for some Arab/Palestinian/Jewish dialogue groups has meant

public education, motivated by the desire to help community members

understand the issues, address some of the divisions in the Jewish

and Palestinian or Muslim communities about the issues, or

demonstrate that Palestinians and Jews can come together and

achieve mutual understanding. Toward this end, groups have held film

festivals, sponsored speakers, demonstrated the dialogue process to

various community groups and faith communities, and started youth

dialogue programs. Other groups have initiated more political actions,

such as lobbying congressional representatives, publishing statements

in the press, and participated in direct action demonstrations. Groups

should have neither the expectation nor the prohibition of collective

action. What is of critical importance is that groups negotiate the types

of actions they want to pursue.

Some of the North Town group members recall:

We struggled for a bit on do we move ourselves into action, subcommittees

and the like – we tried all of these things (signing petitions,etc) and then we

came to the conclusion – there was collective wisdom – where we decided

"no," we want to be different than any other group and if we divorced it from

action, then we relieve ourselves from that pressure and then allowed each

one to go out and do their thing…

Another member adds:

I just want to add that because I think we got very clear at one point that if we

were to take particular actions and positions, we would be setting ourselves

up to be defined by other people. So we agreed we didn't want to meet

anybody's expectations, be defined by anybody's expectations and really let

our own journey emerge. ….

Most of the groups I spoke with in which members attained profound shifts

discovered that talk was action and that taking positions was not the purpose

of the group. However, having said that, there is no one set prescription for

establishing the common goal in a successful dialogue group. Another,

different model of dialoguing is that of Ishmael and Isaac, a Cleveland based

group that recognized the difficulty in dialogue groups and decided to do

things differently. They formed a group whose mission was "promote the reconciliation of Israelis and Palestinians through collaboration with American Jews, American Arabs and others who share this vision" (I and I website). They feel that small steps of cooperation are more important than dialogue through conversation. The founder of the group stated: "working on a humanitarian project of mutual concern together, putting sweat equity around a project that you both care about, the dialogue happens informally." Finding that common goal, according to Ishmael and Isaac, will lead to dialogue automatically. Their projects have included fundraising for a pediatric oncology center at August Victoria hospital (a Palestinian hospital) and for an ambulance for an East Town-sister city town in Israel. Through the mutual project, the two sides socialized, became friends and dialogued informally. The emphasis on "the interdependence in the pursuit of common goals" as stipulated by the contact theory proved to be the most essential ingredient in the successful dialogue of the group that calls itself Ishmael and Isaac.

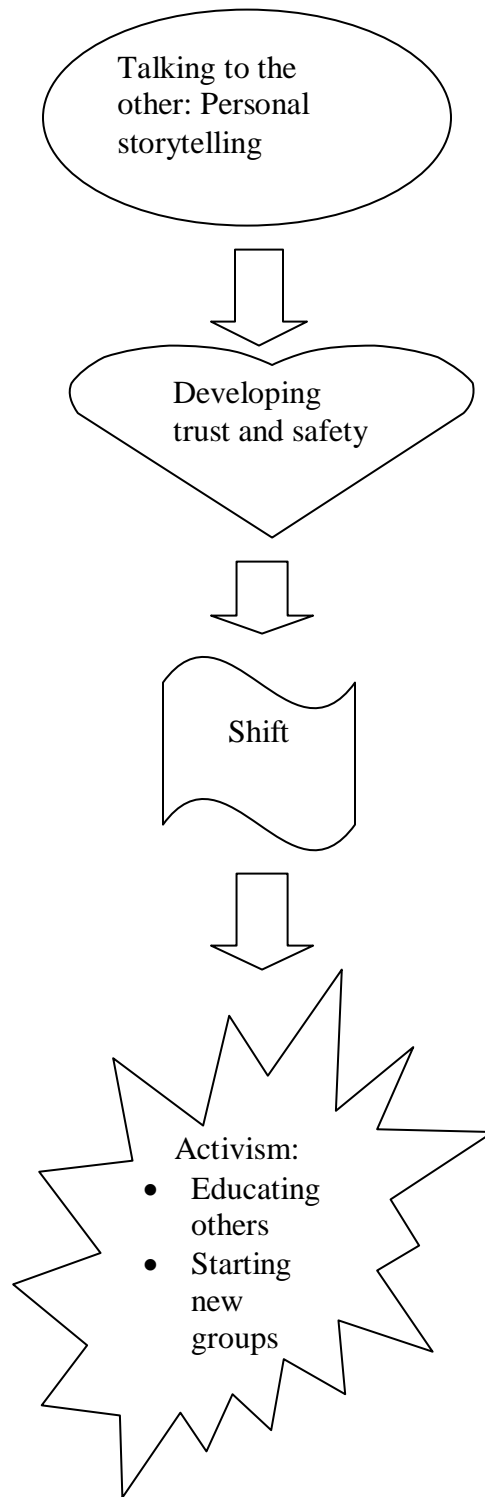**The Arc of the Dialogue-Encounter Group**

Both the West Town and North Town groups have developed a model: a progressive arc from dialogue to ever-expanding circles of community action. First, the action itself is sitting with the "enemy" whose story they haven't heard yet, and telling stories. At first the dialogue group itself is the action and it is exciting just to be meeting. The next step is the group process – the development of trust and the safe place. Then come perception changes – or the shift - that occurs within the group and for each member as an individual.

And finally, the group begins to look outside itself. Then there's a natural progression to the activism stage, taking in the community and involving new people. But it's an organic process. The stages cannot be rushed.

The activism stage seems to have three parts:

1. educating others

2. starting other groups

3. advocacy projects – this stage is difficult without the meso or macro support.

The model would look like this:

Talking to the other: Personal storytelling

↓

Developing trust and safety

↓

Shift

↓

Activism:
- Educating others
- Starting new groups

Part III: Results

At the end of Chapter 2 of this dissertation, I identify a list of questions that I hoped to answer in these pages. In Chapter 7 in the Results section of this dissertation, I address the questions referring to the Contact Hypothesis and Social Identity Theory. In Chapter 8, I discuss the Dimensions of Dialogue and in Chapter 9, I turn my attention to the question regarding shift. Here are the research questions as I posed them in chapter 2:

- The contact hypothesis suggests that under certain conditions, contact between members of different groups can improve intergroup relations and reduce tensions and hostility. Is there evidence from the case studies to support the contact hypothesis? How are relations between the Arabs and Jews in the dialogue groups improved by contact?

- Social identity theory claims – as stated originally by Henry Tajfel (1978) - that an individual begins to think and feel and behave in a certain manner because of his or her membership in a particular group. How do these intergroup dynamics play out in the dialogue group and how might those dynamics be conducted in order to turn it into a positive. Can social identity theory be harnessed to improve intergroup relations in a dialogue group and thus reduce tensions and hostility?

- The literature on dialogue theory suggests a number of critical dimensions necessary for successful interactions. These dimensions include: active listening, the suspension of assumptions, psychological safety, being present (I-Thou), focusing on relating rather than agreeing. What happens in these groups when the dimensions of

dialogue exist and what happens when the dimensions are not

present?

- The phenomenon of shift is a positive transformation or a change in

    attitude. In the sample that I have identified, do shifts occur and what is

    the nature of these shifts?

- What is the impact of the dimensions of dialogue on shift?

- What can be learned from the three case studies on how to improve

    the effectiveness of group dialogue in social conflict?

Chapter 7: The Contact Hypothesis and Social Identity Theory

Contact Hypothesis

As mentioned in chapter two of this dissertation, the contact hypothesis specifies certain conditions under which intergroup contact improves relations. Allport specified four conditions for optimal group contact: (1) equality of status of the different groups, (2) their cooperative interdependence in the pursuit of common goals; (3) the presence of supportive social norms and (4) sustained interactions between individuals (Forbes, 1997, Pettigrew 1998, Amir, 1976, Allport, 1954). More recently Pettigrew (1998) added (5) the encounter should carry a potential for the formation of friendship with members of the other group.

Both the West Town groups and the North Town group did in fact fulfill the five conditions: Both groups took great care in seeking equality between the groups. The initial part of this condition is parity in numbers. The groups invited an equal number of Jews and Arabs. If a Jewish member dropped out, they would try to fill that seat with another Jew and vice versa. They would also add new members but only if they could maintain the parity between Jews and Arabs.

The issue of equality of status, however, is perhaps more important. As one dialogue group participant pointed out to me: We [the Jewish community] have been here a long time – over 100 years in this community. The

Palestinian community has only been here for about 25 years. You can't compare the two." Despite this qualification, the groups stress the equality of status within the space contained by the group. That is, though the members may not be of equal social or economic status outside the confines of the dialogue encounter group meeting space, within that space, all are allowed equal time to talk, listened to equally and accorded equal respect.

The East Town group, however, which gathered in KD's office, did not actually make an effort to have balance in numbers, nor did they achieve equality of status. From the start, parity in numbers could not be achieved because of confusion around who belonged to which group. The people who came self identified in unexpected ways. One of the Jewish participants for example, identified himself as "neutral," thus immediately a competition over who belongs to which group and the establishment of subgroups became central instead of marginal as the dialogue proceeded; as one member explained: : "we weren't together as a group; we were breaking up into these pieces."

Although members of the East Town group may or may not have been of equal social and economic status outside the group, within the group what seemed to happen is that the person who was most eloquent and articulate became the person of highest status; as one member explained: "one participant was very politically active…Everything out of his mouth was a proclamation, beautifully articulated, that would basically shame everyone into questioning whether or not they were a good human being."

The inequality of floor time was reinforced rather than expedited by the facilitation. The facilitator of the East Town group was perceived as privileging one group over another. The facilitator's bias reinforced the sub-groupings and pitted one against the other. Of the subgroups, there was a large group in the category of "interested others." What effect this had on the group is beyond the scope of this paper, although one dialogue group participant described the effect of the "interested others" on their group: "They bring a different perspective. They're not meat or milk, and frequently, in their zeal to help, they muddy the waters." Thus, for the East Town group, the fact that parity in numbers was not achieved nor equality achieved through judicious facilitation led to many grievances and failure to dialogue.

Next, the condition of interdependence in pursuit of common goals is one of the conditions for successful contact. In a dialogue encounter group – as I define it earlier - understanding, telling a story, listening to each other's stories are the common goals. In the successful groups, the arc of talking and then continuing on to activism seems to arise organically, at the right time for that group. When this movement occurs naturally the group then has the additional common goal of social and community activism. In the East Town group the tension between talking and action was present right from the start. Instead of allowing the arc to occur in an organic fashion, members wanted to jump ahead and move directly to action in the form of motions, position

statements and community demonstrations, etc. The common goal of talking first, acting later was not firmly established.

Third, support of authorities, laws or social norms is essential for a successful outcome according to the contact theory. In Israel, dialogue encounter groups are often legitimated due to their links with respected institutions such as universities and some also receive government funding which would add to their legitimization (though also to their politicization). In the US, dialogue encounter groups such as the West Town and North Town groups are more often unaffiliated grassroots groups but sanctioned by the American norms of equality, fairness and equal opportunity (which they also contracted to live by as ground rules). The East Town group did in fact have the support of authorities; K (local politician)'s imprimatur lent its weight and authority. However, this was not sufficient in itself, apparently, to ensure its success perhaps because social norms were not adequately set. Here again the question of facilitation becomes central. Norms of listening respectfully and giving equal time to different viewpoints need to be established from the outset. One East Town group member reports:

The facilitator didn't seem to notice when people were waving their hand, and it ended up being the people would have to just jump in and say things, and then it would just be like the loudest voices prevailed, and other people didn't get to talk and other people felt like they never got called on by the facilitator."
The successful West Town and North Town groups effectively established norms and ground-rules that ensured the respectful attention of the group to

every speaker and stressed the foremost value of listening as the cornerstone of the group's process. In the words of a group member:

I've come to realize that the two most important characteristics are openness and respect. No of course you have to listen. But there has to be that openness, that willingness to not just listen but to really hear the Other. And then respect – even if something you don't see totally eye to eye, you respect the Other for whatever they are. And some people join and they don't have that. And they don't change, they cannot change. And then they don't belong in the group. (I (Jewish member) – AA).

Fourth, the contact theory stipulates sustained interaction between individuals. This means that the group continues to meet regularly over time. One of the West Town groups has been meeting for sixteen years, another for more than five. The North Town group has been meeting now since 2002. The East Town group fell apart after about a year. Each group was in a different stage of maturity. Many of the studies of weekend dialogue encounter groups show that they have no effect on prejudice or tolerance levels and I believe that these are clearly because of the lack of sustainability. The time element and the regularity of meeting and membership thus become essential as one member of the West Town group asserts:

…a trust develops on its own because of familiarity and you start to trust this person because you see them on a regular basis. So, that helps break

barriers and I can learn more about you because now you're part of my family and I see you on a regular basis.

Another group member reinforces this:

If you meet someone and know them over a period of time, whether you want it or not, they will become familiar to you, and if you see them on a regular basis, it cross-develops…you become like family." (SM)

Fifth and finally, the possibility of friendship formation. The dialogue encounter group is an optimal setting for the formation of friendships and this was strongly upheld in the successful groups. In the West Town and North Town groups friendships formed naturally through meeting in homes, sharing meals and socializing. None of this occurred in the East Town group. One West Town group member discusses the importance of friendship in the dialogue group:

By gaining friends you become welcome in the other person's community too. "I would be a welcome guest among them' (SM). I know the door is open for me. And I would welcome them into my home and my community.

All five of Allport's conditions are important. The successful West Town and North Town groups met all five of the conditions. However, the East Town group did not achieve equality not in numbers, nor in facilitation. And jockeying for power by speaking louder than everyone else remained an issue within the group. Next, a common goal – whether dialogue as common goal

or a group activity – was never established. Third, the presence of supportive

authority was present but social norms of who gets to speak when and how

others listen were never established. Perhaps because of their inability to

meet the first three conditions, the fourth and fifth never were attained either.

The group was not sustained over a lengthy period of time; it fell apart amid

much turmoil after 8 or 9 months and finally the hostility that was present in

the group was so great that friendships were not formed with other members.

The Common Ingroup Identity Model described by Gaertner, Dovidio and

Bachman (1996) suggests that when the prerequisite features specified by

the contact hypothesis are present, members' perceptions are transformed

from us and them, to a more inclusive, "we." This model "proposes that

intergroup bias and conflict can be reduced by factors that transform

members' cognitive representations of the memberships from two groups to

one more inclusive social entity." (Gaertner, et al, 1996). "The reason why the

features specified by the contact hypothesis reduce intergroup bias and

conflict is because in part they transform members' cognitive representations

of the memberships from two groups to one group."(Gaertner et al, 1996)

without actually forsaking the subgroup identity. In certain contexts it would be

undesirable or impossible for people to relinquish their ethnic or racial

subgroup identities. Subgroup identities are rewarding and relinquishing them

would be threatening. I would additionally hypothesize that in a sustained,

successful dialogue encounter group, the members "shift" and form a new

common and expansive identity, transforming the "us and them"- thinking into

a new "we" frame of mind, without forsaking their original ethnic subgroup identities. The question of subgroup identities and how the dynamic between subgroups plays out leads directly to the question of Social Identity Theory.

Social Identity Theory

East Town dialogue group member:

The dialogue was dysfunctional: Even though I'm a peace person and a lefty, I became this person defending Jews and defending Israel and …I was becoming a person that I don't even want to be!

As this quote demonstrates, social identity theory is so powerful that its influence prevails even sometimes against the will of the participants. We find ourselves categorizing ourselves and others by social identity and then assigning a value based on that categorization (See chapter two for a discussion of Social Identity Theory).

In Arab-Jewish dialogue groups the context will determine the group affiliation – when there is conflict outside the group, participants are likely to be constantly engaged in presenting their own identity as worthwhile and as more legitimate than the other. In the case of the East Town group, the conflict outside the group as well as the jockeying for position within the group led group members to barricade themselves behind positions that shored up their group's identity and strengthened the group's legitimacy – even when they did not want to be defending those positions. By trying to achieve legitimacy the groups were actually engaged in moral ingroup favoritism, a

casebook example of social identity theory at play. Additionally, in many Arab-Jewish dialogue groups the subject of who is the more legitimate victim becomes an issue that is contentious. Holocaust for the Jewish members and the uprooting of the Arab populations in 1948 and 1967 for the Arab members become evidence in their quest for legitimacy (Nadler, 2000).

The question then posed in Chapter two can be addressed here. Is it indeed possible to harness the force of Social Identity Theory in an inter-ethnic dialogue group in a positive way such that tensions and hostility are reduced? Is it possible to create that safe place, as one group member described the West Town group "a respite, a relief from the horrible situation, a place where we can get together and communicate" despite the external conflict.

Scholars and researchers of this phenomenon feel that: "…instead of trying to erase feelings of group belongingness one should try to nurture and encourage members to identify with their respective groups. Only contact between individuals who feel that they belong to a worthwhile and esteemed group is likely to generate less prejudice and hatred toward the other group. A meeting of this kind is a meeting of individuals who belong to different and unique groups that have equal status." …(Nadler, 2000)

In the West Town and North Town groups, members felt their ethnic identity was strengthened by belonging to the dialogue group. Alongside the pride in their own ethnic identity, many felt that they gained new understanding of the

history of the outgroup, respect for the traditions and compassion for the suffering of outgroup members.

The East Town group attempted - in the early Appreciative Inquiry type exercises - to instill a sense of pride in the subgroups. The groups were divided into their subgroups (creating a morass of confusion because the Arabs were both Christian and Muslim and thus did not see themselves as united, the Jews were from religious Orthodox to secular and a whole subgroup was formed of liberals who believed themselves to be humanists and thus not part of any religious group and created a sense of moral superiority to the others) and asked to discuss when the best time period for their people. Perhaps the idea was to instill a sense of pride in each group and also to strengthen each member's affiliation with his or her group. Theoretically this would make sense. Recognizing the importance of social identity in people's lives leads to what may sound like a counterintuitive suggestion to decrease hatred between individuals from two conflicting groups, one needs to strengthen members' identification with their respective groups. Bringing then together some of the lessons from the contact hypothesis along with social identity theory it would make sense that in order to generalize from "I like Fatma" to "I like all Arabs," it would be important to view Fatma as a representative of her people. A changed perception of all Arabs can be achieved if Fatma is viewed as representing her people. (Nadler, 2000)

However, the exercise in the East Town group seemed to backfire and create more hostility rather than less and the final result was that the Jewish members of the group walked out en masse. Why didn't it work?

Perhaps David Bohm once again holds a clue to the answer. The emphasis here was on fracturing and breaking down rather than making something in common. Bohm: *Thus in dialogue, each person does not attempt to make common certain ideas or items of information that are already known. To attempt this would be to reduce human communication to message-transmission-and-reception. Rather, it may be said that the two people are making something in common, i.e., creating something new together* (Bohm, 1996, p. 2).

In making something new together in a dialogue group – when it works - dialogue becomes a way of life: Dialogue doesn't just happen between Arabs and Jews. It needs to be practiced inside the group and outside. As one group member explains: *I now see myself in many ways dialoguing all the time…I'm confronted by dialogue when I relate to people.* And this is the greatest transformation that can happen that will lead to the "tipping point," (Gladwell, 2002), the shift for the two peoples to create a new reality together one that encompasses both peoples, both stories, both sides and expands them into a whole, a composite, an integrated new story.

Chapter 8: Dialogue and its Dimensions

This chapter will address the question on the dimensions of dialogue and will attempt to discover whether these dimensions were present in the three groups that I studied. An important first point to make is that not everyone experiences the same group in the same way. For one, this is a true dialogue, while another is frustrated with lack of connection or the various dysfunctions that groups can get mired in. One feels that the group is too gentle, and would like to be challenged more while another feels that the anger and hostility is just below the surface and would be ignited were she to speak her mind honestly. So, rather than label a group "dialogue," "conversation" or "debate," etc, it is perhaps more useful to find the dialogic moments and weave them together to discover whether, in balance, the group is nearing its own self-styled goal of dialoguing. To that end, it might be useful once again to define dialogue and to unpack the data with the objective of sorting and stacking the patterns that emerge and then to examine each group separately to understand whether and to what extent the dimensions of dialogue were present.

The dimensions of dialogue include:

1. Active listening to enhance learning and to balance perceptions;
2. A focus on personal storytelling instead of on "facts" or relating rather than agreeing;

3. Suspension of assumptions;

4. Establishing psychological safety;

5. Expansion, or embracing ambiguity as opposed to a polarization of opinion;

6. Finding shared meaning through cognitive as well as affective dynamics.

If debate is a polarized form of interaction in which participants must choose between mutually exclusive positions and adopt either one position or another, dialogue, in contrast, shifts away from the either/or world view and adopts a position of both/and (in other words, expansion or embracing of ambiguities see fifth dimension of dialogue), by recognizing that there are both differences and similarities between supposedly competing positions. The tensions between the differences and similarities provide the space for creating new possibilities for moving forward…(Barge, p. 168)

In the West Town group, members disclose an example of this kind of "both/and" thinking:

I think you come to the dialogue group to listen to the other side of the story, because every story has two sides to it, every image has two sides to it, and of course, …you have to believe in your story but there must be another side to this story ,and in order for the story to be a peace story…we have to get the other side…Whether we agree with it , or we decide to disagree, we have

to incorporate the other side of the story in order for our story to become complete. It must become enmeshed."

Another term for the "both/and" thinking would be expansion or being able to hold two contradictory thoughts as valid. Although the political positions of members of the group may or may not change, dialoguers describe an expansion, an understanding of the other side, an ability to hold two opposing positions inside them and find that the ambiguity is good, is not even contradictory anymore:

Palestinian member of a West Town group:

Israelis are talking about THEM and Palestinians are talking about THEM and we're just not seeing the other. So, for me, I think now [after the work I've done in the dialogue group] that I can live in both worlds, and it's taken me a really long time to get there, but now I see both sides at the same time.

Buber develops this concept: "The absolute of dialogue is a "unity of contraries" (Buber, 1965b, p. 111)- the courage to state and maintain a position and the courage to change when responsively appropriate." (Ronald C. Arnett "A Dialogic Ethic 'Between' Buber and Levinas)

Members of both the North Town and the West Town groups have reiterated self reflexively: "Every story has two sides; every image has two sides." And that "we are not here to change minds but we hope that we can expand our

thinking." And further: "Neither side can make progress until they can hold both stories, and not just one story or the other."

Another member reflects on his learning from being part of the dialogue group: "When you don't hear the other's narrative, then you are only half. Because I made space for the other's narrative, then I am whole…"

An interesting example of containing and embracing ambiguity is the Jewish member here reporting how she feels threatened by the ideas of the Palestinian member of the group and yet at the same time realizes she can trust her. Thus, this member holds the conflicting feelings of being threatened and trusting simultaneously:

But I remember W said in a very early meeting that she didn't believe in a two-state solution. She thought that eventually this would become one state. I felt very threatened by that. And I still feel threatened by that. And I still feel that it's a completely unrealistic position, because the Arabs as much as the Israelis want their own culture and their own control. And I just can't see, you know, especially in this day and age with countries that are bi-cultural or tri-cultural are all falling apart, why would we suddenly go in the opposite direction? But she may be right in 200 years. I don't know. But I felt very threatened by that. And bristling. Although as a person I didn't feel threatened by her,… well, at first before I knew her, I thought how can I become trustful and comfortable with someone who has these kinds of views? But I do trust

her and we've become friends because I almost immediately realized that this was going somewhere else. That our points of view are not the whole picture here. (L-AA).

The dialogue member above who speaks of "point of view not being the whole picture," leads to the second important aspect of dialogue: the suspension of assumptions (Isaacs, 1993, 1999) if assumption can be another word for "point of view" (in this specific context). The notion of suspension has a dual meaning. One meaning involves taking individual and/or collective assumptions and suspending them in front of the interactants for examination. A second meaning of suspension is "for individuals or groups to suspend their most deeply held beliefs… Suspension, in this sense is about vulnerability – opening one's mind to consider new viewpoints and ideas and potentially letting go of one's own ideas…"(Barge, p. 168)

Members of the West Town groups reflect on opening up, relinquishing judgment: "To join a group like this…is to listen to people's stories and not make a judgment about these stories…I learned to do that in this group. I never did it before."

In the West Town and North Town dialogue groups members brought their long held assumptions - notions that were taught them collectively as children - and learned to suspend them. The stories and the dialogue experience caused a profound shift in the participants' understanding:

And one of the things I've come to terms with is that what I was taught in

Sunday school, in religious school about the founding of the State of Israel

was propaganda or if not propaganda, only half the story. We were taught

that Jews told the Arabs no one is going to hurt you. But that's not the

experience that the Palestinians had when the Israelis came to power.

…there's a different story….When I listen to people telling their stories they're

giving me an unbiased story that they went through. There's no attempt to say

who's right and who's wrong…We don't get that in the Press most of the time.

…"

Members discuss how they share personal stories, allow themselves to be
vulnerable, put themselves "out there." By sharing stories, members suspend
assumptions and allow themselves to be touched emotionally and cognitively
by the other:

"… by telling our stories…it becomes very, very personal. I come to know you

as a friend, like where you went to high school and you had a best buddy that

you shared your secrets together and you know what?, in many, many

ways…I feel a very close tie on a personal level with members of the group. I

have gained friends….For me as an individual, it means a lot, rather than put

up a wall and close it between me and the Jewish people. I know the door is

open for me."

Telling personal stories with the intent of building a new story leads to the
third important feature of dialogue. Dialogue, like debate, involves balancing,

advocacy and inquiry (Ellinor and Gerard, 1998) but uses them in fundamentally different ways from debate. Dialogue uses advocacy as a means of hearing one's perspective in ways that enhance group members' learning. The purpose IS NOT to force a group to accept one's view or to convince others of the superiority of that view, rather the intents is to offer one's perspective so that the resources for building shared meanings and understanding are enhanced. (Barge, pp 168-169).

One important point that was spoken of by members of these groups speaks to the fact that the intent is not to impose a point of view on anyone else:

"No one's trying to change anyone's mind about anything…the fundamental root is all the same. We want peace; we view each other as human beings. So, there's no fighting, so to speak, so it's not intimidating in that way. So, I think that creates the safe feeling, where you're not going to come into a hostile-feeling environment."

This member talks about letting go of a need to get "the facts right." In other words he is suspending his need to be right on a factual level, which would address the second stipulation of dialogue mentioned above, but also the balancing of different perspectives (active listening for learning and to balance perceptions), or the first major attribute of dialogue:

"…[T]*here are many experiences in the group that deepened my experience and appreciation of the other…hearing about how people felt about things,*

how things looked from their perspectives, what their story is and sometimes it touched a personal level, because I met people who were probably in the same place at the same time as I was in the West Bank, or in the prison camp but on the other side. And here we meet as equals, sometimes friends, not enemies anymore. …It deepens my appreciation of the fact that everybody has a different perspective and you cannot delegitimize someone's experience. …you can't invalidate someone experience even if they get the facts wrong or not the way you did… that doesn't change their experience of it" (West Town, AM)

One member of the North Town group recalls how initially, when she first joined the dialogue group, she wanted merely to be an advocate for her people and to have the Jews understand her perspective. But in the process of listening to the others – inquiry - she began to change

*I've learned a lot from each of the six sisters who are Jewish. And also from my Palestinians sisters, because each one of us is so different…I realized just by sitting and learning and listening and not reacting but thinking about what I just heard, and why is it creating these emotions in me, it started to change me." (*H/AA).

The new emotions that this member describes are the foundation for building a shared new vision together in the group. Listening to the other, and hearing new stories, leads to new interpretations of past events and the possibility of a different vision of the future.

David Bohm describes a dialogue group experience in the following way:

In the beginning, people were expressing fixed positions, which they were tending to defend, but later it became clear that to maintain the feeling of friendship in the group was much more important than to hold any position. Such friendship has an impersonal quality in the sense that its establishment does not depend on a close personal relationship between participants. A new kind of mind thus begins to come into being which is based on the development of a common meaning that is constantly transforming in the process of the dialogue. People are no longer primarily in opposition, nor can they be said to be interacting, rather they are participating in this pool of common meaning which is capable of constant development and change. In this development the group has no pre-established purpose, though at each moment a purpose that is free to change may reveal itself. The group thus begins to engage in a new dynamic relationship in which no speaker is excluded, and in which no particular content is excluded. Thus far we have only begun to explore the possibilities of dialogue in the sense indicated here, but going further along these lines would open up the possibility of transforming not only the relationship between people, but even more, the very nature of consciousness in which these relationships arise." (Bohm 1987: 175 as quoted in Smith (2001))

As a mirror to Bohm's words, the following quote is from a dialogue member who describes how his group has gone beyond defending positions and have reached a place of shared meaning, shared understanding:

One key thing I'd like to mention …why the group is a success is to realize that we're not here to win an argument, because I think that's what's happening in the other groups… …a dialogue groups that work is because you let go of a need to convince somebody else and it is really grounded in the quest for understanding.

Thus, the North Town group and the West Town groups have demonstrated moments of true dialogue in the sense described by Bohm, Buber and other scholars of dialogue. They are also in some ways conversational groups if conversation is the all-inclusive category that includes communication that can be dialogic, discussion oriented, debate oriented, solidarity seeking, bickering, joking around, etc. Pearce and Pearce (2002) "use dialogic as an adjective or adverb (rather than a noun) describing a distinctive quality of communication in which any speech act can be performed. Rather than naming some forms of communication as dialogue and contrasting it with other forms such as discussion, debate or monologue, these practitioners refer to a distinctive quality of "dialogic communication" or "communicating dialogically" that can be done in any form of communication. When communicating dialogically, one can listen, ask direct questions, present one's ideas, argue, debate and so forth (Pearce, 1995). The defining

characteristic of dialogic communication is that all of these speech acts are done in ways that hold one's own position but allow others the space to hold theirs, and are profoundly open to hearing others' positions without needing to oppose or to assimilate them." (Pearce and Pearce, 2002)

I believe that dialogue is a type of conversation and that both involve what Gadamer (1979) would call a fusion of horizons of understanding:

The horizon of the present is being continually formed, in that we have continually to test all our prejudices. An important part of that testing is the encounter with the past and the understanding of the tradition from which we come... In a tradition this process of fusion is continually going on, for there old and new continually grow together to make something of living value, without either being explicitly distinguished from the other. (Gadamer 1979: 273)

I believe that the "testing of prejudices," the "suspension of assumptions," the melding of traditional thinking and new ideas, and the natural tension that arises from this fusion of understandings, from the expansion, from the holding of two seemingly contradictory positions is what leads not necessarily to conflict resolution as one might expect but to an even greater phenomenon: that of "shift," which will be addressed at length in chapter nine.

The West Town Group

First, it may be important to reiterate that the group defines itself as a dialogue group and professes that it is conducting dialogue. Although many of

the advocates of dialogue stress the cognitive aspects of dialogue, the West Town group itself would probably view dialogue as spanning the spectrum from the cognitive to the affective levels (which is why I like to call them "dialogue encounter groups" with the word "encounter" as a all-inclusive term which can include the emotional aspects of the meeting).

This particular group stresses listening as its guiding principle. As such, and in its attempts to truly listen, I believe that this group is conducting dialogue in the Buberian sense of seeing the other holistically, being present for the other and – as Buber states "speaking and listening" where being responsive to the other is just as important (but not more important) as expressing yourself.

This group does not remain solely in the cognitive spheres as suggested by Schein, Isaacs and Senge; however, there is - at times - an effort to contain the very strong feelings that can arise in a dialogue encounter (dialogue dimension no. 6).

. It's not that you don't have feelings, it's not that you're not allowed to have emotions, and of course, people do, but there are rules about blaming and getting hostile or violent or whatever.

This attempt to cool things down is akin to Bohm's metaphor of the electrons: When confronting tough issues, people… collide with one another at times. Dialogue seeks to alter this by producing a "cooler" shared environment, by refocusing the group's shared attention. When this takes place, people can

spend time in high energy interactions with reduced friction, without ruling out

differences between them…"(Isaacs, 1999)

Members of the group describe it thus: "When things get heated, we return to

the guidelines, making sure that everyone has their say. You get to say your

bit and then listen as best as you can."

At its best, the West Town group with its emphasis on storytelling (dialogue

dimension no. 2) and telling personal truths practices Freire's notion of

dialogue which speaking a true word from the heart.

In the words of the members of the West Town group:
Those kinds of stories really keep bringing the group back to the reality of

what it is we're there to talk about. And there's so much news every day that

everybody is so invested in this, that they come to those meetings with it on

their heart.

As Freire says, "[t]hrough this process, the world is transformed."

The North Town Group
Similar to the West Town group, the North Town group certainly defines itself

as a dialogue group. One member here contrasts the dialogue that North

Town group conducts with the non-dialogue of a previous group she had

participated in.

Before the North Town group I was in a dialogue group … It was a good group, but there were lots of tensions and it wasn't a dialogue group, it evolved more into a discussion group where people's political views could be argued with. …

This group member is unknowingly echoing Peter Senge (1990) who compares and contrasts dialogue and discussion. According to Senge's view, the previous group as described above was in a discussion because the members were presenting and defending different views, while in the dialogue conducted by North Town group they are discussing complex issues without necessarily coming to a conclusion or decision but rather discovering a new view or shared vision together.

The North Town group member – again, unwittingly - mirrors Senge in her own words:

…I think it's very different when you have a dialogic conversation that's really focused on an issue, where there's a lot of politics involved and positions, versus when you're dialoguing about something existential… Something where you're talking about a concept and bringing in your meaning-making and your own personal examples... It's easy for that kind of conversation to get into sort of a discussion for example on two state vs. one state solution in the Middle East, the pros and cons, making distinctions, breaking things down, talking about the pros and the cons. Those are all elements of a discussion. Not that you can't have a good discussion, but it's not the same

as dialogue..… because really the purpose of dialogue is that you get to some sort of new understanding.

However, having said that, the North Town group goes beyond the cognitive level of Senge's dialogue and engages in conversation in all its permutations. The member reflects this:

In a sense, dialogue is a learning conversation. Now, of course you can have a discussion where you learn something, right? …. But I think, well, what's the purpose of discussing that current event... what's the point of it? We all basically have the same values …

She is saying that the point to dialogue in her view is not to discuss issues or to change minds, but to understand the other.

As Gadamer asserts: In conversation [as well as in dialogue] we try to understand a horizon that is not our own in relation to our own. We have to put our own prejudices (pre-judgments) and understandings to the test….We have to open ourselves to the full power of what the 'other' is saying and in so doing, we seek to discover other peoples' standpoint and horizon.

The North Town group seems to be doing this effectively: *… it's basically not about changing minds. I think that's one of the hallmarks of the chemistry of our group, and maybe that's what makes it dialogue. We don't try to change anybody's mind… I think mostly we don't stay on the level of positions,*

because we kind of realize that those don't really prove to be very fruitful

conversations.

The "fruitful conversations" that the North Town group conducts carry the

hallmarks of a true dialogic encounter.

The East Town Group

In contrast to the West Town and North Town groups which talk about expanding their horizons and validating the others' experiences, and through this process, developing profound friendships and trust, the East Town group never cultivated these attributes. In fact, hostility grew as a result of the encounters. So, what is the difference?

In my first chapter of this dissertation, I mention the difficulties of dialoguing, the roadblocks to meeting, the mines set to detonate in the fields of encounters. The research generated by the West Town and North Town groups made dialogue seem almost too simple. But the experience of the East Town group, which involved dis-connect and hostility despite the best of intentions, sadly, is more the norm of interaction in many – perhaps most - such dialogue groups.

One might immediately jump to the conclusion that it is the people, the individuals themselves who formed the North Town and West Town groups who must be more open, more willing to expand, to connect, to listen; however, to refute that, so many of the dialogue members of the North Town and West Town groups had previously been members before of groups that had fallen apart – reminiscent of the East Town group. The following statements are from members of the West Town and North Town groups who recall past attempts at dialoguing:

The group fell apart because of "lack of clarity as to the aim of the group…North Town group would never fall apart because of profound differences….It would be part of the material that we would work with. But…"(L-AA).

I was part of a different group: there was a lot of anger, so they [Quakers] had a huge group together in a comfortable space. There must have been thirty or forty of us …but we were sitting in that room, mean and women and they made us sit apart. So, we had the Jews on one side and Palestinians on the other and the Quakers in the center. We did not connect. ..we were all proud of ourselves because we all sat in the same room with the other. And we met a few times and it just wasn't going anywhere, because it was, all right you had your say and it was putting out our grievances and …there was nothing in it. I don't know why they would call it a dialogue group. But it lasted for about a year. …but nothing happened . (W –AA).

The second group I was part of was in the first Intifada. ….the Jewish women were all there with an ideology (Hadassah representatives, Israel advocacy) and the Palestinian women were there to advocate. So we put the Jewish women there in a position to be taught, so they're there to learn whether they wanted to learn or not. I don't know where they were coming from but we were there to teach. I could speak only as a Palestinian but we were there to teach them and we were there to influence and effect…But we had good

times because some of the women were wonderful. …I made a couple of friendships…but there was obviously an agenda, we were not there to learn from the other, we were there to educate the other. We wanted to tell rather than to listen. So, after having a good time, we're not achieving our objective. None of us thought of it as an unachievable objective….So, that fell apart and a lot of Palestinians at that point, who were involved in that decided, thought it was a waste of time. People are dying and what am I doing?

How is it possible to make sense of what happened in the East Town Group and, by association, with the other groups that don't achieve the Gadamerian "fusion of horizons?" Both the Contact Hypothesis and Social Identity Theory can help elucidate the experience of the East Town group and also shed light on the successful groups as well. The East Towners came to the group with a desire to dialogue but the contact hypothesis was not optimized. Some of the pre-requisite conditions for the contact hypothesis were established but others were not. For example, equal status did in fact exist in the group. However, common goals were not established as is evidence by the debate over whether to engage in dialogue or in activism; supportive norms that would establish psychological safety were not established and friendship opportunities did not emerge. In addition, the strong pull of social identity theory – tendency to see the in-group in a favorable light and others unfavorably - became the predominant force at work in this group. Or, as one dialogue group participant described it: "for about three to five minutes everybody would be nice and the meeting would end up in a debacle. It was a

debacle because somebody's temper would get out of whack and he would accuse someone else of stealing his father's olive tree or whatever and the whole thing would be a fruitless exercise."

Finally, the dimensions of dialogue – or their absence – help explain the failure to dialogue of the East Town group and others like it. The East Town group for the most part did not succeed in embracing ambiguity and expanding their thinking; active listening never became the norm of the group; though some personal storytelling was used, it was shunted aside in favor of the call to action; psychological safety was not established and being present in Buber's I-Thou relationship was overturned and instead members were seen as one-dimensional representatives of the Other.

Dimensions	West Town	North Town	East Town
Active listening	√	√	-
Personal storytelling	√	√	-
Suspension of assumptions	√	√	-
Psychological safety	√	√	-
Expansion	√	√	-
Finding shared meaning	√	√	-

Chapter 9: Shift

This chapter addresses the questions related to shift. As stated, shift is a positive change in attitude toward the other. I have found evidence in my data set that shifts do occur and through a phenomenological reading have identified the nature of these shifts. In the 28 interviews I conducted, approximately, 72% of interviewees reported shift. This breaks down as follows:

In the West Town group: 63%

North Town group: 99%

East Town group: 25%

Looking at the above statistics, it would be fair to draw the conclusion that the East Town group had the lowest occurrence of shift due to the fact that the dimensions of dialogue were most absent from this group's encounters. Thus, there is a positive correlation between the dimensions of dialogue and the presence of shift, which leads to the next question of the nature of that shift.

Sometimes shift hits with a bolt of lightning – out of the blue, spontaneously unexpectedly. Sometimes shift is like a rainfall that gently falls to earth, nurturing the soil and preparing it for cultivated new growth, new insights, new experiences. The lightning-bolt shifts are transformational, dramatic but hard to predict and harder to replicate. They can happen at any place and any time both in a dialogue group and outside of one. The rainfall shift can be incremental, created and re-created in a dialogue group setting. Some of the

most dramatic shifts told to me by dialogue group participants were

precursors that led the participant on a windy path to the dialogue group.

While others were stories of mindful, gradual shifts that occurred as a result of

connections, conversations and profound friendships formed within the

crucible of the dialogue group.

What is a shift?

Researchers define shift as "a positive, qualitative change in the relationship

between conflict parties, including changed attitudes toward oneself and the

other party, the conflict issues, and the conflict situation as a whole. Shift

includes cognitive change (e.g., perceptions, attributions) and affective

change (e.g., feelings, evaluations) within and between the individuals and

groups involved in conflict." (Carstarphen, 2002).

A detailed description of the shift or transformation that occurs is as follows:

… shift occurs in individual attitudes (thoughts and feelings) at the individual dimension—attitudinal shift— and is expressed through communication and behaviors in the transactional dimension—behavioral shift. The process for achieving shift is both an individual psychological process and a transactional process between individuals and groups. Further, when individuals from different sides experience both attitudinal and behavioral shifts, the result is a shift in the relationship between the parties. Thus, there may be individual, interpersonal, intergroup shifts and a shift in the total group or a "total group phenomenon" (Stock & Lieberman, 1981, cited in Pearson, 1990). As Borris (1998a, 1998b) notes, if we can better understand the process of "healing the heart" at the individual level, we can then look to the implications of this for healing between people and groups at larger levels. (Carstarphen, 2002).

Alternative words commonly used to describe shift are, transformation,

turning points, breakthroughs, and "aha" moments:

The Transformational Shift

One way to explain and elucidate the transformational shifts that hit like a lightning bolt may be to look at them through the frame of the discursive and recursive processes as described in Kolb's Conversational Learning (2002), if "conversational learning" and "dialogue" transformation can be seen as parallel processes.

In Conversational Learning (2002) Kolb et al assert

"Conversational learning occurs within two distinct but interconnected temporal dimensions: linear time and cyclical time. The discursive process is guided by linear time whereas the recursive process follows a rhythm of cyclical time. The discursive process is an epistemological manifestation of individual's ideas and experiences that are made explicit in conversations. As such, epistemological discourse is a linear process of naming and describing individuals' ideas and concepts generated in conversations from past, present to future in a continuous flow of activities.

The recursive process on the other hand is an ontological and subjective manifestation of the desire to return to the same ideas and experiences generated in conversation. In this sense, ontological recourse is cyclical in nature, where ideas and concepts acquire new meaning as individuals return to the same conversation to question and inquire about their experiences anew. As such, learners' abilities to simultaneously engage in these two temporal dimensions will largely determine the depth and quality of learning generated in conversations."

The following stories told by dialogue group members demonstrate the two dimensions described above. The recursive aspect of the stories is well worth keeping in mind because for all three of the narrators, the event caused them to question previous assumptions and to make new meanings of earlier experiences. Though we humans often tend to shy away from the recursive, ontological end of the dialectic (Kolb, p. 59, 2002 quoting Hans (1989)) these three examples are stories told by people who were confronted by an event

that forced them to face rather than avoid the recursive ontological process

and as a result these became life changing events for them.

Ari's Story (names have been changed to protect anonymity)

Ari is an Israeli man living in West Town recalling an experience he had while

serving as a soldier in the Israeli Defense Forces in the West Bank:

…I started my political journey on the right….. a long spiritual journey….by the time I joined the dialogue group I was ready for it. I was spiritually and politically ready…

… during my military service, I had some duty in the West Bank. It was the first time I actually saw anything having to do with the conflict in a direct way, not sitting in Tel Aviv and watching it on TV. So, that gave me a slightly different perspective…
I understood that if I were in their [Palestinians'] shoes, I'd be feeling pretty much the same way they are, which is something that kind of underlies the conflict…it's not that there's a misunderstanding here, we understand each other perfectly, we just don't agree….
So, having direct exposure gave me a different experience. It didn't quite change me right then, but it gave me an experience that stayed with me and kind of helped me change later.
Over time, I started seeing that the whole thing is not working, and has no chance of working, in the direction that it's going. It's impossibly inhuman. They groan in Israel, but the ethos we grew up with demanded that we have… a higher standard than most people. When I was confronted with the reality of it, it was like, okay, we talk like that …but we do not behave like that. That experience led me to the politically and morally driven choice to leave Israel.
You know, it's actually the same values that put me on the right, to begin with, that led me to be where I am today. …I still feel there are strong connections to the land; I feel an ancestral connection to the land. I do feel that Jews in general, Israelis in particular need security….But at the same time, I believe in a higher standard. I do believe in being human first. If the price of having all that is to become what we've always resented about other people doing to us, then it's not worth it, because you have to be human first. And part of the love of the land means that you also have the responsibility to love the people who live in it.

What is unique about Ari's story is how aware he is of the recursive and

discursive process though he does not - naturally - use these terms. He

describes his journey in temporal terms. "I started my political journey on the

right." He explains how the childhood education of being taught an ancestral

connection to the land, the directive to have a higher standard are all part of

the assumptions that he was aware of and that he brought to the

conversation; here I am using the word "conversation" very broadly because

in some sense Ari's experience in the West Bank was part of a conversation

with the Other and certainly contributed greatly to his internal conversation.

To expand on the discursive and recursive processes:

…the discursive process follows a linear time progression from precourse to discourse to postcourse. Precourse is a manifestation of previous conversations, which sets up the assumptive frame of the discourse. In this sense, precourse serves as the "fore-structure" of the conversation (Hans, 1989) or "prejudgments" (Gadamer, 1989) that individuals bring into the conversation. Simply stated, in anticipation of joining a particular circle of conversation, individuals have assumptions and expectations about the experience they will embark on. These assumptions and expectations will ultimately influence and shape the discourse they are about to join and establish their positions in the conversation.

The discourse takes the sets of assumptions generated through precourse and begins a process of "framing" and then proceeds to elucidate the implications of those assumptions a process of "naming."

….yet the regular return with a difference is at the core of all understanding and it ultimately guides humans to attain a higher level of consciousness.

So when Ari undergoes the experience in the West Bank, he is aware of the

precourse – the set of assumptions that have guided him up till that point. He

contrasts sitting at home in Tel Aviv comfortably watching the news with the

experience of actually being there. Then he has a flash of understanding that

if he were in the others' shoes he would behave the same way. This leads

him to question earlier assumptions about being educated to believe in a

higher standard. Although he still believed in this creed, the new experience

led him to make different choices based on the same ideology.

Ari is also very aware of how the experience in the West Bank moves him to a

recursive process of renaming and revisiting his prior assumptions. He

returns to his prior assumptions but with a difference. The difference leads

him down a different path – one that ultimately causes him to make an

ideological choice to leave Israel and to make a moral decision to join in

dialogue with the Other in the community where he establishes his new

home. The dialogue is of a different texture than the one he had begun in

violence in the West Bank. So, Ari's discursive process began with the event

in the West Bank (precourse); continued with discourse – the internal

conversation that led him to leave Israel to rename his ideology (discourse)

and led him ultimately to the the dialogue group itself (postcourse).

Al's story

A similar process highlights Al's very different experience as a Jewish

Psychologist from East Town:

I had been doing some research on how we align our opinions emotionally. My theory was that when you get emotionally aligned with a person or some side, it blocks us from being able to take in data.

I was driving home one day and listening to National Public Radio and a Palestinian woman came on. The woman was talking about the hardships of living in refugee camps or something and in my mind I immediately started

thinking, yes, but what about the Jews and the hardships they had to endure in refugee camps etc.

And then I stopped myself all of a sudden. Maybe, when I'm doing that, that emotional blocking, I was doing what I had been researching about. And, literally - talk about a change moment - at that moment, I could hear that woman's story and feel empathy for her. Just at that moment.

Similar to Ari's story above: Al had a moment that redefined his previous

assumptions that caused him to rename and revisit his earlier ideas. Again,

similar to Ari's, this was also a self-reflexive moment which tied into an

internal conversation that Al was in the process of having through his

research into the psychology of emotional alignment. His lightning-bolt

moment when listening to the Palestinian woman's story was of course set in

motion by an earlier internal conversation driven by his research. Again, this

moment was pivotal in seeking out an Arab-Jewish dialogue group to

continue that conversation but as in the recursive process the dialogue

changed as a result of the lightning bolt moment.

Ahmed's story

Ahmed is a Palestinian man from Gaza. The following is paraphrased from

the personal narrative he relates in a dialogue group meeting:

He was accepted to a degree program at Hebew University in Jerusalem – a

mostly Jewish university. And was scared…. This was the first time he had

spent so much time and had been so immersed in a mostly Jewish

environment. He expected to be treated with hostility and animosity. Instead,

he found immediate acceptance. The instructor asked for a volunteer from the

class to help Ahmed with translation from Hebrew into English. More than one

student volunteered and he ended up making a connection with a young

Jewish woman who had spent time during her military service in Gaza. She

related to him how wrong she felt while serving in Gaza and how she felt that

despite her pro-Israeli government political views, she learned through her

experience serving in Gaza that Israel needed to change its policies. This

conversation impacted Ahmed greatly and changed his assumptions

concerning many of his earlier experiences and educations. Since then he

has been involved in dialogue with Israelis and Jews in both Israel and the

United States.

The three stories above demonstrate how we are always in dialogue, in conversation (we never step into the same stream of consciousness twice). Even when we are outside the formal container of a dialogue setting, we are constantly in that discursive and recursive process. We find ourselves reviewing, renaming and finding new meaning in experiences from our past.

These kinds of transformational change moments are difficult for the social scientist to study. These shifts cannot be "harnessed;" they are not replicable. You cannot export that experience to someone else. However, when seen as "precourse" or the seeds planted that can be nurtured and cultivated within a dialogue group there begins to be a coherent seamless flow.

Winding Paths to Dialogue

As we have seen above, sometimes people seek out and join dialogue groups because of internal spontaneously-generated changes that have occurred which spurred them to seek out a more formal discourse process. And sometimes people arrive at a dialogue group experience driven by different "precourse" motives and unexpectedly find themselves changing as a result of the experience. Here it may be useful to look at the various motivation that drive dialogue group participants as a way of bridging the "lightning bolt" transformational and incremental "rainfall change." I parse out the Palestinian and Jewish dialogue members because there appear to be very different motivators leading them to dialogue.

More than one Palestinian participant articulated his or her motivation to dialogue as hoping to have a platform or a place to be heard. This member describes how he was initially drawn to dialogue because he thought it would be an opportunity to *"express how I feel to some Jewish people, what happened to me and to my family and to my people and to my country, as a Palestinian." (EB-SM)*

Another Palestinian participant mentions how she thought that her

…talking and dialoging and speaking out might make some of the – mostly Jewish mainstream I'm concerned about here – rethink what's going on and take another look. And maybe hear another story that they're really very carefully kept from hearing. …

This member felt initially that her role was to teach others and effect change in others but that she herself had little to learn from a dialogue group. As she herself explains:

I was very familiar with Jews before the dialogue group but many of the Jews I meet have never before met an Arab…(H-AA)

And change comes sometimes creeping in at the door as the same dialogue member so eloquently goes on to describe:

So [I came to the dialogue group] to bring my narrative and my story and who I am to the Other, rather than to learn about the Other. But I did learn a lot about the Other. I thought – I came with the premise that "oh, I don't have to learn anything, because I know all about Judaism." But I've learned a lot, because each of the six sisters who are Jewish. And I've learned a lot about my Palestinians sisters, because each one of us is so different. And I realized, just by sitting and learning and listening and not reacting , but thinking about what I just heard, and why is it creating these emotions in me, it started to change me. (H-AA).

Others Palestinian dialogue group participants are led to dialogue because of a psychological need for a catharsis, a purging of anger a need to understand the other.

I was raised by a father who had a lot of anger when I was growing

up…handed to me , sort of a baggage he had based on his experiences. His

family was from Haifa. They had a big home there, and actually they owned a

lot of property, so the family left in '48 when the fighting started…Everybody

dispersed and my father ended up making his way to the US…He had a lot

of bitterness because they lost everything there. So, when I was growing up, I

remember hearing a lot of stories about Jews and …just a lot of anti-Semitism

I remember growing up with…I felt like I really wanted to so something about

the anger I was carrying with me. So, the dialogue offered me the kind of

interesting opportunity to meet with Jews, it has really helped me see things

differently. It was like a personal healing…a personal therapy, dealing with

that …So it's been personal as well as being sort of external and being able

to do good in the world on the issue….(MT-SF)

And yet another dialogue group member of a different group describes her

rage and hatred of Jews and Israelis and a need to rid herself of the negative

feelings. She came to the realization that she had "lost who I am…and I need

to deal with this, the hatred part…I would look at them [Jews/Israelis] and say

they are horrible people and look at what they have done…" But due to her

own spiritual and philosophical awakening (again, the precourse) she came to

the group "opening myself up to the other…" (W –AA)

The Jewish members come to dialogue for various other reasons. Many feel

they are progressive and feel a need to distance themselves from what they

perceive as the media and the "pro-Israel" camp. One explained that she

came to the dialogue group because she wanted to "come across as a 'good-

guy' to the Arabs.

Postcourse

The dialogue group itself is postcourse to many earlier conversations, though precourse to others in a complex web of conversational networks, dialogic connections and common storymaking,

"Finally, the end of the conversational discourse leads to postcourse. There is a process of sorting what to keep from the conversation and what to throw away. The resulting story of the conversation becomes precourse for future conversations, thus transporting the discourse into other contexts and the future. Thus, any conversational discourse is embedded in a complex network of previous and future conversations. (Kolb, p. 60, 2002).

Incremental Shift: Cultivated Shift

Many participants experience gradual, incremental shifts that don't come "out of the blue" like a bolt of lightning but like a steady rainfall that drop by drop nourishes the earth and slowly transforms the field healing the earth of its wars, cultivating the possibility of peace.

There appear to be three stages to this kind of incremental shift. Individual, Interpersonal, Political though they don't always occur in a linear fashion. These stages reflect the progression from Individuality to Relationality as described by Kolb (2002). The individual stage corresponds to the "Inside

Out" stage while the political corresponds to the "Outside In" and the Interpersonal seems to be an intermediary step where someone begins to apply the internal lessons within the group, as if trying out the new forms of understanding in the safety of the group, before moving into a more extroverted, externalized activity.

Inside Out: The Individual dimension

The following testimonies demonstrate various ways in which dialogue group participants find themselves changing as a result of the encounter with the Other within the crucible of the dialogue group. For some, it provided them with a stronger understanding, better education, a change in the perception of self and a strengthening of their identity:

Identity shifts

One member describes how the dialogue group experience gave her confidence:

I feel like I'm more educated and more knowledgeable. I have a better perspective. I know what to look for – I know more what the issues are. …I also feel like I'm not so buttoned up …afraid to talk, because I feel like I can talk much more that I did before than I could before…

Conversely, another dialogue member talks about becoming more measured, more tempered, with a hint of a shift in ideology:

I also feel I've become much less strident. All my life I think that I thought that Jewish people were superior, that they were Chosen People, and that they

were better and they were ethically superior and morally superior and they weren't criminals and they didn't' do all those horrible things that other people do…And I see that differently now. I've become more of a humanist than a loyal Jew. And still, I don't hide my Jewish identity. I am proud of my Jewish identity. But it's changed….(I-AA)

Another discusses how she has strengthened her own ethnic identity:

I became much more in touch with my own identity as a Jew. Whereas before I thought very little about it. I had originally joined the dialogue group as a facilitator and then became more aware and more conscious of myself as a Jew. (M-AA).

Another member discusses how her definition of self has shifted:
And the other thing that's happened to me …I am a Holocaust survivor, and I have been trying to move away from my identity as a Holocaust survivor. It's contradictory – on the one hand, I'm more into it because I do a lot of speaking and now people know me in the community and so when spring comes - that's the time it comes up - …so I continue to do that at schools and in the community. But on the other hand I find that Holocaust survivors are very, well, they're paranoid. The anxiety has become permanent and they're usually staunchly pro-Israel. I'm pro-Israel too but not pro-Israel's policies. And so I have a harder time now to relate to the survivors when I meet them, because there's a rigidity, there's a paranoia, there is this chronic anxiety that this is going to happen to us all over again. …so in that sense,

I'm trying to pull away from the archetype of Holocaust survivors. On the other hand, I'm very much involved in talking to kids and then also because of my role in the North Town group, I can't get away from it. …and people in the North Town group know that there can be such a thing as a Holocaust survivor who is pro-co-existence. (I-AA).

Emotional as well as cognitive shifts are common among dialogue group participants. The following is a particularly powerful example of how this member experienced an emotional shift as a result of the dialogue group experience:

I used to hate Jews, Israel and Zionism. But then I got to know Jews and I realized they weren't my enemy. But I still held onto my hatred of Israel and Zionism. But then I began to understand Israelis and I began to see that some Israelis were doing the right thing, so at least I could still cling to my hatred of Zionism. Zionism had all kinds of associations for me and when people would use the word I would cringe. But then I started to realize that when people talk about Zionism they mean different things. To me, Zionism is what hurt me. And I resent it. But then they would say, there's this other kind of Zionism and then I would say, I've been struggling to define my enemy not as a Jew, not as an Israeli, give me a break, let me at least have Zionism [laughing]…Talk about expanding… (W-AA).

Although rarely did dialogue group members report large scale political shifts from liberal to conservative or vice versa – perhaps due to the fact that those

who choose to join dialogue groups often already espouse a liberal political viewpoint - however, subtler political shifts are common:

Politically I changed too. I started using two-state solution and the words occupation – before most Jews said these words.

In this regard, another member shares:

I shifted from a fundamentally adversarial approach – and I'm still against the Occupation and my politics are still in the same realm – but I'm less interested in doing that kind of work. It has become more to me about making the table big enough for everyone to sit down at it – right-wing people, left-wing people center people and people who don't even want to put themselves on the spectrum. (MalkaLA). So, I've really shifted in terms of looking at solutions and looking at solutions that would be inclusive. I still think that there are some places where it's okay to be adversarial, but it's not really my work right now. My politics haven't changed, but my approach has.

And sometimes the dialogue group experience surmounts and transcends politics:

One of the really interesting things that happened last year is that our most politically conservative Jewish participant and one of our most left-wing Palestinian Muslim participants became close friends outside the group. They were totally far apart on politics. I mean as far apart on politics as you can get

and they became real friends outside the group. …the shift or transformation

comes from knowing each other.

And many of the dialogue group participants reported sensing a shift in

themselves in simply hearing the stories of the Other:

What changed me was hearing the stories of the Palestinians and realizing

there was a different story from what I learned in Hebrew school and from the

Jewish press and even from the American media. (MZ-SM)

Relying on personal narratives heard in the Dialogue group to get the full

picture of history – transformative.

The stories led me to feel I can live in both worlds, it's taken me a really long

time to get there, but you know what, …I see Israel's security issues and I see

the reality of daily life for Gazans. I can see both sides. (MT-SF)

One of the most moving accounts of shift came from these two dialogue

group members who describe an internal, emotional shift which can be

labeled simply "a sense of peace:"

When we meet.. a Jewish guy calls me a brother, and I call him a brother,

what opens my heart when we embrace every time, we hug each other and

this tells me the choice is mine – to be that brother or to look at him as an

enemy and to try to harm him…(EB-SM)

I have peace….I have Palestinian friends. It's changed my life totally. I don't

live in war. I don't hold anybody prisoner…My life has changed. So, I live in

peace. (AM-SM)

The Interpersonal Dimension

The shift begins within on emotional and cognitive levels. But soon the shift

expands to include the other. Once a person begins to shift, to change, to

transform, he or she will change his or her behavior toward the other. This

begins in the dialogue group itself:

We change our minds to the degree that we act differently after a meeting like

this. We interface with other people in a different way, we're open to having

new kinds of friends …new thinking…

Gaining a friend

One of the most important shifts discussed by many dialogue group

participants seems simple but can have a profound impact on their lives, and

that is a restructured social life, gaining a friend:

.

Intellectually, I felt that I understood the other, but I didn't realize how

personally touched and moved I would be by really having friendships with

the other…knowing people fully and all the nuances and just how enriching

that was, and not just about this but sort of how that translated into other

things too…this is where I start knowing myself and the other and going slow

and not painting with the broad brush…I have called myself a life long activist,

but I don't feel attached to that phrase any longer. I think I'm more

comfortable with the idea that change needs to be more organic, more

personal and that is a result of this dialog group experience." (AA group)

…This isn't activism; it's internal and then something comes from that, but it is

not the old 60s confrontation thing.

Other dialogue group members explain the importance of gaining friends:

By gaining friends you become welcome in the other person's community too.

"I would be a welcome guest among them' (SM). I know the door is open for

me. And I would welcome them into my home and my community.

"In the beginning it was conviction for me, but after a while, I just want to

come and see my friends…people I care about, regardless of where they

came from…" (SMgp)

Gaining friendships within the dialogue also entails sometimes losing

friendships outside the dialogue. Thus a restructuring of the member's social

life is often one of the consequences of joining a dialogue group:

I lost a friend as a result of their participation in the dialogue group. "…she was just so repulsively aggressive that I said to her, you know, on this subject, you and I are not going to talk anymore…we didn't really see each other the way we did before for years…

Another example of how the dialogue group promoted a shift in social structure is attested to by this dialogue group member who comments that her fellow dialoguers "*find they have more in common with each other than with others from their own community." (SM*) and now they have a new sense of community which is very fulfilling.

And another dialogue group member goes on to reflect on how her life has changed as a result of the friendships formed in the group:
I've been enriched – the friendships and the connection with the other's culture, the events and the people we meet and the bonding. Because they are very strong friendships. …the dialogue enables you to go deep – you have an opportunity to talk about things that there are very few people to talk to and about these things. And often it isn't your spouse. …most people in our society are either on one side or the other. ..so we had this sacred space, where we could talk about things, try to grapple with them, try to understand better….

Other dialogue group members comment on the profound effect the new friendships have had on their worldview:

The shift was going from a two-dimensional awareness to a broader world view. I didn't even know Palestinians…I knew intellectually that the Occupation was wrong, but all I knew of Palestinians was what I saw in the news. It was very caricatured and so, now, I'm getting to know all these Palestinians and there's a multidimensionality of getting to know people as human beings and sort of beginning to have a sense of the culture, and the vibrancy and sophistication of people just like me. …In fact, it felt like my world had gotten bigger. Not only do I have some wonderful connections and friendships that have enriched my life, but my world view is bigger." (AA)

If the stages in the shift begin with the self and then expand to include the interpersonal dimension, soon the dialoguers find themselves applying the shift that started within the group to other personal situations:

This member was initially drawn to dialogue because he thought it would be an opportunity to *"express how I feel to some Jewish people, what happened to me and to my family and to my people and to my country, as a Palestinian, but dialogue changed my attitude – not just between Arabs and Jews but in dealing with all people.*

Another dialogue group member comments on the impact the internal dialogue group experience had on his relationships outside the group:

I see myself now in many ways dialoguing all the time outside the group too. The way I relate to people is different.

Another member echoes this comment:

On a personal level – the dialogue group has helped me in my relationship with my daughter. Helped me listen to her side of the story… I still don't agree with so much, but still I cannot impose on her…(EB-SM)

Kolb et al (2002) *The tension between individuality, where a person takes in life experience as an individual process and relationality where life is an experience of connection with others can be described as an intersubjective process whereby an individual maintains a sense of self while at the same time is aware of and open to the influence of others (Hunt 1987, Jordan, 1991)*

Outside – In: Political

The initial stage of shift as I have discussed above is the individual, inside out process marching progressively toward relationality where the lessons learned are then applied outside the group. In the dialogue group experience this often translates into a political activism stage or the arc of movement from internal to external, inside to outreach, from delving within to orbiting out. In the previous chapter I discuss how moving hastily and artificially toward activism can undermine a group's success; however, when the move toward external activism occurs as an organic process in the group, the events can deepen and broaden the experience of shift.

One member explains the orbiting out experience:

We also move out. We move out to the public, we move out to the schools, and we engage with the radio, and television, and classrooms, and the Muslims and the Christians and the Jews and the universities and we help other engage and move out of their front doors, because it's not enough to stay inside of our front door… Expand the circle to the planet….(SMgp) And so, I do feel that this group does reach out to the planet. …that's one of the things that gives it enough meaning to want to come back and to keep it going. (SMgp).

Another member calls it "expanding the circle:"

Expanding the circle…You can't bring everybody into this dialogue but we can take this experience out into a larger arena so more people know about it, hear about it and maybe start their own groups. (SMgp)

Another group member describes some of the activities she has participated in:

We went to the women's studies day event at [nearby] University. It was exciting to see the public interest in what we were doing and the public affirmation and to see that this thing that we had been doing privately was resonating with people was very affirming and exciting and energizing. We also went to a high school here in North Town and the whole high school saw the movie and then we had a discussion and met women and there was the

opportunity to just have a town hall meeting …I think the public sphere can be very powerful as a way of affirming the group's importance.

One Palestinian member explains how fulfilling it has been for him to speak out publicly: *I am the lucky one, I am fulfilling what I always dreamed about, I am given the platform to be able to express my feeling, to speak on behalf of my people…*

Another put it simply:

Being able to educate the community is very empowering. (MT-SF).

Conclusion

Shift can be a powerful phenomenon. It is elusive in the sense that it is sometimes hard to pin down exactly when shift is occurring only that it has indeed occurred. Sometimes it is only understood in reflection on the past. Its ramifications for the future are also widespread and difficult to trace. I would like to speculate that while shift may occur both in informal, lightning-bolt dialogue as well as in a formal, structured setting, in the latter situation I believe that shift may be deeper, more rooted, more enduring than in the dramatic lightning-bolt moments described above. When one has time to examine, to reflect upon and then to re-examine one's journy in a recursive process by continuously engaging in a dialogue group, then the shift is planted and can flourish and grow and be sustained.

Part IV: Conclusion

Chapter 10: Implications for Practice and Conclusion

How does peace happen? Do we first need to hammer out the government

agreements and political negotiations? Or do we build peace through co-

existence programs and social groups? Which comes first: peacemaking

through political agreements and government treaties or peacebuilding

through social encounters and programs? The answer – as is true for most

answers – probably lies somewhere in the middle. Both peacemaking and

peacebuilding need to occur.

Another way of talking about peacemaking and peacebuilding is multi-track

diplomacy. Track I diplomacy is official government diplomacy, while Track II

is unofficial diplomatic policy conducted by behind-the-scenes semi-officals.

Track III, therefore, is when ordinary citizens get together informally in all

walks of life to find ways to promote peace. The aim of Track III diplomacy is

to build broken relationships and heal strife through personal encounters in

communities. The premise of track III diplomacy is that peace can and must

be built from the bottom up as well as the top down. Clearly, my dissertation

is a study of Track III diplomacy.

Another model of explaining how peace can be achieved is the Meta-Macro-

Meso-Micro model. Each of these levels contains specific institutions and

constitutes a sphere of influence in the construction of reality. As White (2004)

discusses in her unpublished dissertation, this model "can be a helpful way to

plot the life and manifestation of the various conflict dynamics, in order to better understand how conflict operates as a holistic system. Each level interacts with others." White (2004) demonstrates this system using the example of South Africa where *"at the meta level, the ideology of democracy and human rights grew in legitimacy to support the call for a non-racial political system in South Africa. The space that this shift created in South Africa was taken up at the meso level where a forum for the transition was created to bring into conversation all the major stakeholders regarding the future of the country. It was only after the meta, macro and meso level created the framework for a new South Africa, that intervention work could happen at the micro level (which is still an ongoing project)."* (White, 2004)

She goes on to discuss the importance of role models at each level who could model the shifting of behavior and attidtudes.

White (2004) contrasts the success of South Africa to the struggles for peace in Israel/Palestine where at the meta level "the current global narrative is one of the "war on terror" and a push towards religious exclusionary narratives of "the other". This is contrasted with work happening at the micro level to encourage individuals from across the divide to discover the humanity of the other, while not being able to support that transformed experience at the macro or meta levels. This could be one reason why the transformations at individual relationship level have not managed to take root in a larger process toward peaceful coexistence." White's analysis gives a cogent and convincing reason why the many micro-level dialogue groups, and coexistence groups, (Track III diplomacy) such as those described in this study are so crucial and yet why traction as not yet been

achieved to attain a comprehensive peace in the region. As White articulately explains, the meta and macro levels in the Middle East do not support peace. So, the groups, while active and vital, do not achieve the dramatic tipping point necessary for peace to reign.

This dissertation examines the micro-level aspect of peacebuilding – one of the important interlocking lego pieces to build a sturdy peace shelter for both peoples. As stated in my first chapter, the obstacles – even just on this level - to building this shelter are many.

Under what circumstances can dialogue produce that shift? The answer lies in some of the topics I have covered here in these pages. Firstly the contact hypothesis provides some insight. Under the right conditions, states the contact hypothesis, contact can lead to successful intergroup encounters. Also, social identity theory helps in understanding how people are drawn to see the other as members of a group and not as individuals and how this can be reversed or harnessed to promote understanding and reduce intergroup tensions. Next, certain dimensions of dialogue need to be present to foster the kind of dialogue that reduces tensions. Thus a new defintion of dialogue emerges from the pages of this dissertation. A dialogue encounter is a special kind of conversation that encompasses active listening to enhance learning and to balance perceptions; a focus on personal storytelling instead of on "facts" or relating rather than agreeing; suspension of assumptions; establishing psychological safety; expansion, or embracing ambiguity as

opposed to a polarization of opinion; arriving at meaning making through both cognitive and emotional dynamics. Emotional meaningmaking is a central facet in this new definition of dialogue.

Finally, I address the last of my research questions based upon the successful dialogues of these groups. What can be learned from the successful case studies on how to improve the effectiveness of group dialogue in social conflict? I address this question in the Implications for Practice section below.

Implications for Practice

Group theory states that important things need to happen for a successful group experience to occur. A group needs to cycle through its stages of development; it needs to establish trust, build cohesion, create a sense of safety, and establish successful facilitation and process. The following practitioner tips apply to all groups and in retrospect I had originally underestimated the role of group theory when I began this process. Group theory is central and should have been part of the theoretical framework of my work as it has time and again proven to be essential to studying these dialogue encounter groups.

Slater (1966) described the small group as a microcosm of society at large. That is, the culture and structures of an individual group are influenced by and reflective of the larger society. The way in which the group's processes and

structures are developed, maintained and changed will also reflect societal

structure, developments and change (Susan A. Wheelan, Group Processes,

1994, p. 25). This is especially true of interethnic groups that mirror the

tensions of the larger society.

According to group theorists, when a new group forms, its primary task is to

create an organized system capable of achieving goals. In order to do that,

the group's members need to develop shared perceptions of how the system

is to be organized. That is, the members need to create a group culture that

will dictate its social structure (Wheelan, 1994 p. 26). To that end, the group

must create a set of guidelines; build a platform to facilitate communication;

ensure a psychologically safe space; design the physical setting, establish

facilitation and process, and - particularly in a small dialogue or

conversational learning group - share personal narratives and create

collective rituals.

Setting Guidelines

All the successful groups in this study have emphasized the importance of

setting guidelines that are adhered to, referred back to and used as a way to

ease new members' entry into the group. The first – and perhaps most

obvious – of the guidelines regards the physical set up and space. Secondly,

establishing active listening and respect is vital and finally, creating a sense of

psychological safety through trust and cohesion must be central for the group

to succeed.

Some of the Guidelines suggested by the dialogue group members interviewed were: abide by the laws of hospitality; establish rules of how to listen and who is supposed to speak and when and empower the facilitators to step in when people get out of bounds.

The Physical Set Up

Some of the groups I interviewed met in living rooms of the homes of participants, others found a public venue, but common to all was the injunction that the space be arranged to maximize comfort levels and to minimize subgroup formation. For example, the cohesiveness of the group might be foiled if all the Jewish participants were to sit on one side and the Palestinian participants on the other side of the room. As one member described a group that did not dialogue successfully: "the Palestinians would sit on one side and the Jews would sit on the other side…it was like black and white in the lunchroom!" A well balanced group is one where there is close to an equivalent number of participants from both or all groups and that all are made to feel welcome and equal in the physical space.

Communication – Speaking and Listening

Communication is obviously an essential process in the development of group culture. Communication patterns that determine - among other things - who may talk to whom are established very quickly. Once established, these

patterns are quite resistant to change (Mills, 1967). Thus it is essential to establish from the start the norms and practice of active listening and respectful speaking.

Both conversational learning and dialogue encounter groups share similar guidelines. The online guidelines promoted by two of the primary Jewish Arab dialogue encounter group activists include active listening, speaking from the heart, focus on learning rather than on being right (Traubman website: http://traubman.igc.org/dialogue2.htm). Similarly, "Conversational learning … [is] espousing an approach where everyone in the group… takes a stance of engaging in genuine conversation that emphasizes listening along with talk." (Baker, et al, 2002, p 47). Schein (1993) qualifies the point about active listing by cautioning that that active listening plays a role in the dialogue process but is not the central focus or purpose. …In Schein's own experience in a dialogue group he recalls

… I discovered that I spent a lot more time in self-analysis, attempting to understand what my own assumptions were, and was relatively less focused on actively listening to others. Feeling and all of the other dimensions of communication are important. Eventually, dialogue participants do "listen actively" to each other, but the path for getting there is quite different [from that of a sensitivity training workshop]." (Schein, 1993).

For a prescription on how to start a dialogue group, establish guidelines and communication, here are David Bohm's (On Dialogue, 2004) words:

Suspension of thoughts, impulses, judgments, etc., lies at the very heart of Dialogue. It is one of its most important new aspects. It is not easily grasped because the activity is both unfamiliar and subtle. Suspension involves attention, listening and looking and is essential to exploration. Speaking is necessary, of course, for without it there would be little in the Dialogue to explore, But the actual process of exploration takes place during listening -- not only to others but to oneself. Suspension involves exposing your reactions, impulses, feelings and opinions in such a way that they can be seen and felt within your own psyche and also be reflected back by others in the group… If you are able to give attention to, say, the strong feelings that might accompany the expression of a particular thought - either your own or another -- and to sustain that attention, the activity of the thought process will tend to slow you down. This may permit you to begin to see the deeper meanings underlying your thought process and to sense the often incoherent structure of any action that you might otherwise carry out automatically. Similarly, if a group is able to suspend such feelings and give its attention to them then the overall process that flows from thought, to feeling, to acting-out within the group, can also slow down and reveal its deeper, more subtle meanings along with any of its implicit distortions, leading to what might be described as a new kind of coherent, collective intelligence.

For effective communication to be established, the group must practice Bohm's idea of suspension and the slowing down necessary to allow all expression and attention without aggression, without judgment, without criticism. To ensure that this happens some have recommended that sanctions be established if the norm is violated - perhaps just a gentle reminder by the group facilitator is enough.

Psychological Safety in the Group

As one of the group members cited, it is crucial to feel that "nobody's coming here to try to change you or harm you or anger you intentionally." The importance of psychological safety for a group cannot be overstated. Schein and Bennis (1965) deem psychological safety as trusting in the power of the group to be supportive and thus to allow its members to be creative and take

on tasks. Argyris and Schon (1978) link psychological safety to norms that develop early in a group's life about what is permissible to be discussed and what is not. When norms are respected they contribute to a sense of psychological safety in the group helping overcome initial uncertainty and establish a predictability which leads to a sense of security, reducing anxiety and thus enhancing the quality of the conversation. Another scholar (Edmonson 1999) establishes a connection between psychological safety and what she calls learning behaviors or processes in group that allow for the possibility of risk taking. Safety, trust among members, mutual respect and caring for each other all create a platform for taking risks that allow members to grow, learn and shift. Esther Dorothea Wyss Flamm, unpublished dissertation, Conversational Learning and Psychological Safety in Multicultural Teams (2002).

In a conversational learning group, the feeling of psychological and physical safety is fundamental. The conversational learning space has been described as a place of listening carefully to build trusting relationships where people feel safe enough to speak freely (Baker, et al, 2002). The definition of this space safe is as follows:

A safe, receptive conversational space is one where nonthreatening, nonjudgmental and accepting attitudes prevail without a fear of embarrassment or recrimination. People are consistently treated with respect and acceptance and offered verbal and nonverbal acknowledgement by their

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peers and people in leadership positions, such as faculty or managers. A

spirit of openness to hear differences is associated with a sense of increased

opportunities for learning. …non-threatening environment…a feeling that you

can offer your opinion and you are not going to get penalized for it in any way,

shape or form. … (Baker, Receptive Spaces for Conversational Learning,

2002, p. 109).

Schein (1993) sums it up by citing the importance of safety for the benefit of

the dialogue group: "the dialogue process speeds up the development of the

group … creates psychological safety and thus allows individual and group

change to occur." (pp 45). My data points to the importance of psychological

safety which can be created through personal storytelling thereby establishing

trust and finally leads to shift. This can be shown graphically as follows:
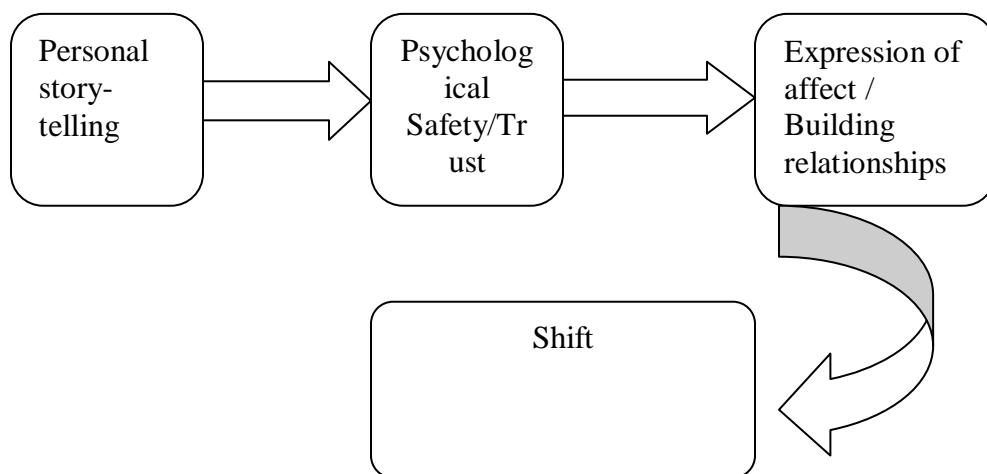
Cohesion and Group Culture

The task of creating a cohesive group can be difficult under any circumstances but for groups containing members from dissimilar reference or membership groups, the development of a cohesive culture and trusting social structure is fraught with pitfalls. For groups in which different values abound, the struggle for cohesion in the group, for creation of a group culture is greater. The disparate value systems intensifies the conflict stage, which is one of the natural developmental stages of groups (See literature on forming, norming, storming, performing and adjourning). In groups in which the reference or membership groups are actively engaged in conflict at the macro levels of society creating cohesion can be particularly thorny. Some groups will fail as a result, but other succeed, as I have seen in this study. And here the contact hypothesis (see lit review chapter 2) helps again. These are the factors that the contact hypothesis proffers as important for success when members of conflict groups come together: equal status, support of authority figures and contact should be intimate and personal in nature to maximize the effect (Slavin, 1985). I would like to add to that list the recommendations from my groups; namely, the value of personal storytelling and creating collective rituals to overcome the inherent tensions and to successfully navigate the conflict stage. See discussion below.

Leadership and Facilitation

In addition to setting guidelines, a very important factor in the success of group formation is leadership and facilitation. Leadership, which is the behavior that directs and coordinates the group members, has been studied exhaustively. Volumes have been written about leadership and its importance in group and organizations. Often small groups such as conversational learning groups or dialogue groups find that leadership is most important in the early formation stage of group development, when dependency and anxiety and needs for inclusion and safety are at their height. The leader, whether appointed or emergent, can be seen as the provider of safety for anxious group members and direction. The leader has a symbolic function during this stage of group development and is offered deference and respect. However, at a later stage in group development, the leader may find that his or her authority is increasingly challenged as the group matures and the leader needs to be able to allow this to happen and know that his or her role will have to change especially in such a democratic group such as a dialogue group (Wheelan, p. 59-61). The leader may be called upon, however, to intervene and at least act as caretaker of the guidelines when the inevitable conflicts of the storming phase of a group's life ensue.

Some of the group members I interviewed share their insights regarding facilitation:

"*Having a facilitator is extremely important, but not just any facilitator,*" says one group member "*…I know that one woman in the group I had been in was*

doing some training in facilitation but for some reason they resisted any

attempt on her part to try to rein us in and have us follow – we were unable to

dialogue…it just became clashes of different opinions. It was emotionally

draining…"

On the other hand, another member recalls a particularly successful

facilitation experience:

….I always felt that part of our success is M. who was a key person in the

North Town group. She was not engaged in the content as much as the rest

of us...[turning to M.] You were more interested in the process. So, as we

would get emotionally entangled, you would slow us down because you would

have to …express the agony of my people, my experiences and all that, and I

think that has helped tremendously…

But finding the facilitator with the right balance of objective and subjective

relationship to the group is a tricky business:

… because in the other group the person who was trying to do the facilitation,

well, we didn't like the fact that she was not participating in the discussion.

We didn't' hear her often enough. …it felt like someone was observing us in

the room…

The facilitator of the Texas group, SJ, describes how she facilitates:

"If someone starts attacking or debating or becoming critical or

argumentative, she steps in and says "Thank you for you comments, now we

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haven't heard from so and so. The group seems to encourage and support this act of facilitation."

In another group, the facilitator role rotates:

"Our aim is that everyone develops the capacity to facilitate. So we take turns in facilitating. But M. has the skill- it's her profession, group dynamic, group process. So she had a lot to offer. When we have a retreat, she'll be the one to structure it. …we have a checkout at the end of each session. We didn't always have that. So at the end of the meeting we go around and say 'how was this?" and maybe she would have more of a role in saying, well, I observed this…for example, she of ten makes sort of 'outsider' comments that some of us don't see. I remember she pointed out for a long time that we were very prone to avoid conflict. And then made a conscious decision that we shouldn't do that.

Similar to conversational learning groups as well as T-Groups (sensitivity training groups, see Bennis and Shepard (1956), Shaffer and Galinsky (1989), dialogue encounter groups are best moderated by a nondirective, "peerlike" facilitator who can also be a participant, or at least by a non-hierarchical relationship between facilitator and group (in the tradition of Carl Rogers' client-centered approach to therapy); "Conversational learning breaks down the hierarchy of leadership even further by suggesting that the facilitator is another peer-like participant in the larger conversation that has brought the group together." (Baker, et al, 2002, p 47).

Personal Storytelling

Both conversational learning groups and dialogue groups believe in the individual's capacity for growth through participation in the group. Each group member has an "inherent ability to learn and develop, as well as to assist others in learning through conversational interactions. It asserts the vitality of conversation: the emphasis on the telling of stories and the sharing of experiences implicitly acknowledges the value of each storyteller." (Baker, et al, 2002 p. 44).

The group members I interviewed all stress the critical importance of personal storytelling narratives. As one member states with great expressiveness:

"The narratives – my God, the narratives; that was hugely important!"
The value of personal storytelling is understood by psychologists. Developmental psychologists contend that the maturation of our sense of self is linked to the stories we tell about our lives:

…if you want to know a person …then, listen carefully and compassionately to his [sic] personal story. If you want to know yourself more intimately, listen carefully and courageously to your own personal story….Authentic personal statements are essential in the process of self discovery …we are language-oriented beings. Our recognition of what we experience, and how we understand these events, depends upon linguistic concepts; conceptualization create our sense of reality…(Goldberg and Crespo, 2003).

Other organizational experts also highlight the effectiveness of the storytelling process. One such scholar states: "The Storytelling process …can transform the tension and competitive agendas [in a group or organization] into esprit de corps and true collaboration…"

Similarly, organizational scholars have found that storytelling can transform a group seemingly "magically" from a tense environment to one in which members can set down their defenses and become a cohesive group:

"Storytelling … play[s] a fundamental role in the change initiative [in the organization], ….[through personal storytelling] the tone of the room was transformed, from tension, quiet and unease to enthusiasm, laughter and collaboration. The hard work was done. " (Kahan,2006).

I believe that the process of storytelling was perhaps the foremost factor in differentiating between the groups I met with that conducted successful dialogue and the group that had collapsed. Dialogue happens in what Cissna and Anderson (1998b) call "moments of meeting" in which people respond to others as Thou rather than it, using Martin Buber's (1958, p. 4) terms, and find themselves transformed because the I of I-Thou is not the same as I of I-it. Such moments cannot be made to happen or delivered on schedule as a package, but they are often found in the personal narrative, in the intimacy created by the individual storytelling.

Collective Ritual

A ritual is defined by dictionary.com as a "prescribed, established, or ceremonial act performed collectively" or "any practice or pattern of behavior regularly performed in a set manner. "Scholars have pointed out that collective rituals influence participants' emotional states and positively impact their commitment to a group: the greater the emotional intensity, the greater the commitment to the group. (Knottnerus 2006).

Based on Durkheim's ideas of "collective effervescence," rituals and rites function … to enhance the sense of participation in a symbolically rich social environment. (http://hirr.hartsem.edu/ency/durkheim.htm) These rites are highly emotional collective experiences, states of "collective effervescence," which overcome the divisions among individuals and subgroups. They forge a collective identity that sustains members of society during periods of dispersion into routine ("profane") activities.(Durkheim, 1995). According to Scheffler (1997), a ritual may express "joy or sorrow, humility, yearning, contrition, triumph, grief, trust, steadfastness, elation, exaltation, supplication, gratitude" (p. 140).

In the groups I studied, the first and most obvious ritual was eating together, "breaking bread" together. The food served often represented the reference cultures of the participants and eating together was usually a way of "breaking

the ice." Soon, though, eating together became a habit, an expected ritual, leading to jokes and levity and creating cohesion in the group.

Other rituals cited by the groups I interviewed were checking-in at the beginning of the meeting or checking-out at the end: "we have a checkout at the end of each session. We didn't always have that. So at the end of the meeting we go around and say 'how was this?" It became a way to bring the participants into the session or conclude in a way that allowed for reflection and closure. Another group opened by reading a definition of dialogue – one page – at the start of every meeting thus reminding the group of the ground rules, of what it means to dialogue as opposed to debate.

Other important rituals were the communal celebration of holidays, birthdays or "birthday of the group." One group produced an intense ritual in its annual retreat in which the group isolated itself for an intense weekend together. Another group described that after a year or so of dialoguing that decided to have a "commitment ceremony" for the group in which each member described what the group meant for them. The interviewee recalls that it was a very emotional event, a "peak experience" and it brought the group to a new level of communication.

Scholars illuminate:

"Essential to the potential of dialogue is the ritual of it: setting the stage and mood for these self-less engagements, surrendering to the mystery as you are performing and reflecting upon it, allowing it to take you with it while you use talk to move it along, attempting to reach a purposeful destination but feeling as though when you get there you have actually arrived somewhere you could not have previously imagined." (Goodall and Kellett, 2004, p. 173)

It's not about Agreement

Above, we have seen that personal storytelling and creating rituals are some of the keys to a successful dialogue environment. There is one more important injunction already mentioned earlier in this paper but which bears repeating. The dialogue group interviewees said it best: "It's not about agreement."

Arriving at an agreement on the external, geopolitical conflict or even about internal conflict in the group is not a recipe for a successful dialogue which brings growth, change and shift to group members. The groups that feel they need to put forth some kind of consensual statement of purpose are actually doing something counterproductive. It's not about consensus, it's about commitment; it's not about political viewpoints, but about emotional understanding; not about accord, but about empathy.

The group from North Town explained: "we have shifted our points of view, at least on the emotional level, but consensus is not what we're after." (L-AA).

Scholars emphasize this point: "…Dialogic models that favor a quest of common ground inherently favor the already dominant position of institutional privilege. …Calls for coming together and finding common ground de facto reproduce the status quo because the ground that is common between participants is that of the dominant culture. This inhibits rather than supports the radical disruption of self that is central to our productive understanding of dialogue. (Deetz and Simpson, p. 145)

Commonly held assumptions are that dialogue should privilege "a coming together on common ground" which inherently privileges the already dominant set of understandings. "From this communicative orientation, those organizations [or groups] who must set their perspectives, insights and understandings aside to 'dialogue' on common ground are likely to continue to feel an absence of voice because their issues will always be beyond the scope of the dialogue" ..Dialogic communicative processes perpetually recover a space for exceeding personal and systemic restraints and distortions. …Reclaiming and taking seriously the demand of otherness on dialogic encounters foregrounds an understanding of communication as a productive process grounded in response to particular political circumstances. This…holds the greatest potential for recovering voice and the dialogic transformation it invites." (Deetz and Simpson, 2004, p. 158).

Gadamer and Habermas put this a little differently but essentially agree. As explicated by Deetz and Simpson: "continual social formation of consensus in interaction beyond the intentions and opinions of the participants….reaching openly formed agreement regarding the subject matter under discussion, rather than on seeking agreement between participant's perspectives." (Deetz and Simpson, p. 146)

When agreement or consensus is no longer the point, then there is room for more than one perspective. A group member can then hold in his or her head more than one viewpoint, thus expanding his or her outlook. This is Bakhtin's conception of dialogue which emerges out of the tradition of literary criticism. …In The Problem of the Text, (1986) Bakhtin discusses "the both/andness of such movements as privacy and disclosure across the timeline of a relationship." For Montgomery and Baxter (1998a) this feature "implicate[s] a kind of in-the-moment interactive multi-vocality in which multiple points of view retain their integrity as they play off each other" (Isaacs, 1999).

In the dialogue groups I interviewed, I expected to find that members of the groups had changed their political leanings, but surprisingly, dialogue does not seem to make you change your political point of view necessarily, but allows you the ability to expand, to contain the others' political view alongside your own. This is the "both/and" that Bakhtin speaks of.

The defining characteristic of dialogic communication is that all of these speech acts are done in ways that hold one's own position but allow others the space to hold theirs, and are profoundly open to hearing others' positions without needing to oppose or to assimilate them. When communicating dialogically, participants often have important agendas and purposes, but make them inseparable from their relationship in the moment with others who have equally strong but perhaps conflicting agendas and purposes." (Pearce and Pearce, 2002)

Conclusion

The personal experience of dialogue is often described using words like "profound," "mysterious," "peak experience." For a dialogic experience to feel complete, it must "end well: In other words, [dialogic moments] must complete some ineffable something that creates in us a sense of an ending, reframing or new beginning – a deep AHA! – or profound connection, a shift. When (or shortly after) it is achieved, rounded off, and completed – as is true for a variety of peak experiences – the experience itself may be said to have been profound."

These profound connections can occur at any given moment in any setting and context. Although not always possible to plan for, creating the space, the circumstances for dialogue, for that profound moment to take place can facilitate its occurrence. In my work, the several dialogue groups that were interviewed including the dialogue group on the West Town, the North Town

group and another Texas based dialogue group which I spoke with are all examples of organized meetings in which dialogue did occur and did lead to profound shifts for the participants.

For Further Research: Quantification, Assessment and Facilitation

I would like to continue the research begun in this dissertation by widening the scope of the dialogue-encounter groups that I study and attempting to quantify some of the findings. Perhaps by doing so it would allow me to develop some measures for evaluating a dialogue-encounter group and to assess whether or not it is on track with the dimensions of dialogue and whether or not the group is achieving shift.

Assessment and Evaluation –

As stated above, there seems to be a great deal of confusion as to how to measure and assess the success of many of the dialogue groups and programs that exist. Seeds of Peace (summer camp for Jewish and Palestinian teens from the Middle East) has been termed by some a failure because it failed to produce a certain number of contacts, activists or relationships. But what does success really mean for a dialogue group? I would like to develop an assessment with a range of variables to measure and determine the success of various interethnic encounters.

For example, to determine whether or not the group is likely to succeed, the group might want to ask itself the following questions:

Questions for Participants:

1. What are our guidelines? Are they clear to all? Are they adhered to and respected?
2. Do I feel psychologically safe in this group/ Do I trust the group?
3. Do I listen actively, suspending judgment when others speak?
4. Do I feel that others are listening to me – without judgment – when I speak?
5. How is our system of leadership and facilitation/
6. Am I comfortable enough in the group to tell my personal story?
7. Have we established rituals and rites? What are they?
8. Do these rituals and rites make us feel more united?

Facilitation –

Finally, I would also like to find the opportunity to apply the findings here in a real time situation of interethnic dialogue as a facilitator. I would like to know if the prescriptions I have developed here on the shoulders of the giants who came before me and based on the wisdom of the individuals I interviewed can be applied and replicated and then published for a wider audience. My hope is to reach enough people so that the dialogue group shift can be experienced by all those in need of its healing powers.

In addition to my statements above, the question of further research returns me full circle to my Preface in which I talk about how I wanted to replicate the experience of the dialogue-encounter group with others. After my dialgoue group experience, I thought I had found the key to resolving the Middle East crisis and felt that dialgoue groups were the ultimate weapon to fight for peace. That early enthusiasm now seems somewhat naïve. This research

made me more clearly understand the complexities that exist and also fixes

the role of dialogue enocounter groups into proportion and place. I now see

them as key but as only a part of a holistic effort. I believe that in addition to

the meta level of societal change, the macro government peace and the micro

dialogue encounter group efforts, the meso level is what now draws me and

where I would like to focus my further research. I am interested in how peace

education can be harnessed and also how the private sector plays a role in

making peace happen. One month after I complete this dissertation I am

returning to live in Israel with my husband and two sons. Raising two boys in

Israel with the looming prospect of their eventual induction into the Israeli

military service is a daunting one for any mother. I feel it is incumbent upon

me for the sake of my children and the children of all the other mothers –

Jewish as well as Palestinian – to continue to work, research, study, apply all

that we learn to make peace happen. This is my personal mission.

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