An Experiment in Peace: Reconciliation-Aimed Workshops of Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian Youth*

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The goal of the present study is to examine workshops of Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian youth conducted in the post-Oslo era with the aim of promoting reconciliation and peacebuilding between the sides. The workshops were organized by an Israeli–Palestinian organization, in the framework of a peace education project. In these workshops, youth from pairs of Israeli and Palestinian high schools met for two days to discuss social, cultural and political topics. Each workshop included approximately 20 youths from each side that were led jointly by a Jewish-Israeli and a Palestinian group facilitator. The study examines four facets of these dialogue events, using both quantitative and qualitative research methods: (1) structure of activities and practices of transformative dialogue used in the encounter events; (2) attitudes and mutual stereotypes held by youth from both sides prior to the beginning of the workshops; (3) mutual perceptions and attitudes expressed by participants during the encounter; (4) effects of participation in the workshops on stereotypes held by the Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian youth (pre–post comparisons).

Introduction

Many accounts of conflict and peacemaking take the form of ‘and they lived happily ever after’, stopping at the stage when the sides reach the peace agreement. The conflict story is assumed to have reached its end once peace agreements have been signed. From then on things are assumed to work smoothly between the sides. However, recent approaches to the resolution of conflict emphasize the long and gradual process of peacebuilding and reconciliation that has to follow the stage of peacemaking (Bar-Tal, 2000; Rothstein, 1999; Zartman, 1998). The examples of peacemaking in Northern Ireland (Arthur, 1999) as well as the Israeli–Palestinian peace process (Kelman, 1999), and the South African truth and reconciliation process (Hamber, 1998), demonstrate that signing agreements between policymakers is not enough. These have to be accompanied by dynamics of social and psychological change at the grass-roots level of populations at both sides—so that these agreements can be implemented successfully (Bar-On, 1997; Bar-Tal, 2000).

One of the devices commonly used for such grass-roots level peacebuilding is the practice of transformative dialogue. The notion of transformative dialogue is presented
in the works of Kenneth Gergen and colleagues (Gergen, 1999a,b; McNamee & Gergen, 1999a,b) as a process through which sides deal with disagreement or conflict between them through expressing themselves, listening to the other and taking in or empathizing with the emotions, experiences, views and values of the other.

Through such dialogue, the sides come to construct themselves and the other differently, extending the boundaries of the self and including parts of the other within the self, and thus including the other within the realm of relational moral responsibility. Perceptions and relations to the other are transformed, and greater understanding, acceptance and connectedness to the experiences and positions of the other are formed (Gergen, 1999a,b; McNamee & Gergen, 1999a).

These ideas of dialogue as changing constructions of self and other, and as enabling, through mainly experiential, affective processes to include the other within the self, resonate with recent reformulations of the contact hypothesis. This major theory in intergroup relations was presented in the middle of the 20th century (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969) and has been examined in a multitude of studies conducted since (Amir, 1969, 1976; Brewer & Miller, 1988; Jackson, 1993). It states that under certain conditions intergroup contact can be effective in reducing prejudice. These include the following four major conditions: (1) the two groups should be of equal status, at least within the contact situation; (2) successful contact should involve personal and sustained interactions between individuals from the two groups; (3) effective contact requires cooperative interdependence, where members of the two groups engage in cooperative activities to achieve superordinate goals that depend on one another's efforts (Sherif, 1966); and (4) social norms favoring equality must be the consensus among the relevant authorities.

Recent reformulations and studies of this theory emphasize that affective processes such as experiencing and understanding the other, including the other within the self, and creating friendships with out-group members are crucial for contacts that are conducive to improving intergroup perceptions (Liebkind & McAlister, 1999; Pettigrew, 1998; Wright et al., 1997). Pettigrew (1998) examined the effect of emotional ties of friendship with out-group members on attitudes toward them and found that having an out-group friend predicts a lower level of prejudice.

Wright et al. (1997) demonstrated that in line with predictions of the extended contact hypothesis, even just the knowledge that an in-group member has a close relationship with an out-group member leads to more positive intergroup attitudes.

In a similar vein, Liebkind & McAlister (1999) studied in a field experiment the effect of extended contact through peer modeling in a program for tolerance promotion among Finnish middle school students. In the experimental schools, printed stories of in-group members engaged in close friendship with members of out-groups were presented as examples of successful intergroup contact. Results showed that examples of intergroup friendship can have an impact on intergroup attitudes. Attitudes of tolerance remained stable or showed favorable changes in experimental schools while these attitudes worsened or stayed the same in the control schools.

The present study concerns a model of intergroup contact that emphasizes experiential and affective components of relating to and sharing experience with the other through practices of transformative dialogue. The studied encounters took place in the framework of the Israeli–Palestinian efforts of building peace through peace education. Israeli and Palestinian youth participated in a series of dialogue sessions in which they gradually learnt to know each other by
sharing personal narratives regarding different aspects of their lives in the conflict.

Many studies were conducted on dialogues or encounters between Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel (Bar & Bargal, 1995; Bargal, 1990; Bar-On, 1999; Desivilya, 1998; Maoz, 1997, 2000a,b; Sonnenschein, Halabi & Friedman, 1998; Suleiman, 1997; Rouhana & Korper, 1997). Although these resemble in many ways encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians from the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), there are also several important differences between the two contexts of encounter.

The first encounter is conducted between two national groups within the same state, sharing the same citizenship and the same economical and educational system, that generally live in peaceful nonviolent relations of coexistence. The second encounter, in contrast, is conducted between members of two separate and at least semi-autonomous national entities that are in relations of acute violent conflict or have been in such relations until recently.

Although studies have been made on interactive problem-solving workshops of Palestinian and Jewish policymakers, leaders and elite members (Kelman, 1992, 1998; Pearson-d’Estree & Babbitt, 1998; Rouhana & Kelman, 1994), little research has been done on Israeli–Palestinian dialogues at the grass-roots level. This is in spite of the large existing volume of joint activities, especially since the signing of the Oslo Accords (Adwan & Bar-On, 2000; Mi’ari, 1999), and the impressive funding given to these projects of Israeli–Palestinian cooperation mainly by European and American sources interested in stabilizing the Middle East.

Acute conflict still persists, even after the onset of the Oslo political process, over crucial issues such as the fate of Jerusalem and of the Jewish settlements in the territories, Palestinian national sovereignty and the Palestinian refugee problem (Kelman, 1998).

This conflict is characterized by continuing violence of each side towards the other; terror attacks of Palestinians towards Israeli citizens, on the one hand, and violence of Israeli soldiers and security forces towards Palestinians.

The other problematic feature of the Israeli–Palestinian situation is the harsh imbalance of power between the sides. Though the peace process has begun, the Israeli–Palestinian situation remains, in many senses, a situation of occupation and domination of Palestinians and of the territories they live in by the Israeli state and army forces. The Israeli government has strategic and military control over major parts of the territories inhabited by Palestinians, has control over resources such as water supply and work permits in Israel for Palestinians, and restricts movement of Palestinians both inside the territories and from the territories to Israel.

The questions that arise are: Can a transformative encounter take place in a situation of acute conflict and harsh asymmetry? Could it have any effect on improving intergroup attitudes, or will it only cause an escalation of hostility? The present study addresses these questions through examining the processes and results of a grass-roots level ‘experiment in peace’. Investigated are a series of dialogue workshops designed to promote reconciliation and peacebuilding between Israelis and Palestinians. However, the consideration of these questions has important implications for efforts in peacebuilding through dialogue that are made in other conflict sites such as South Africa and Northern Ireland.

The workshops investigated here were conducted in the spring of 1998, during the post-Oslo peace agreement era, when the Likud Party, representing relatively hawkish positions in regard to conceding to the Palestinians, led the Israeli government. This period was marked by difficulties from both sides in implementing the Oslo agreements.
and arrangements, and by stagnation in proceeding with the political process toward a final peace arrangement (Bar-Tal & Vertzberger, 1997; M. Maoz, 1999).

The study examines four facets of these dialogue events, using both quantitative and qualitative research methods:

1. The structure of activities and the practices of transformative dialogue used in the encounter events.
2. Attitudes and mutual stereotypes held by youth from both sides prior to the beginning of the workshops.
3. Mutual perceptions and attitudes expressed by participants during the encounter.
4. Effects of participation in the workshops on stereotypes held by the Israeli and Palestinian youth.

Research Site

Investigated are a series of workshops in which 15- and 16-year-old youths (10th graders) from pairs of Israeli and Palestinian schools met for two days to deal with social, cultural and political issues through the sharing of personal narratives and through discussions of the conflict. Some 20–23 Jewish-Israeli and 20–23 Palestinian youths participated in each of the three workshops investigated here. These workshops were organized and directed by a jointly managed Israeli–Palestinian NGO (nongovernmental organization) in the framework of a peace education project, and were held in various locations inside Israel, mainly of a mixed Jewish–Arab nature. One such location was Neveh Shalom, a cooperative Jewish–Arab village; another one was Tantur, a Christian compound situated on the outskirts of Jerusalem and of Bethlehem, very close to the checkpoint and actually spreading across both the Israeli and the Palestinian side of the checkpoint. English constituted a lingua franca for both groups of participants in the workshop. In some meetings, each side spoke its own language, and the group facilitators cross-translated.

Participants

In total, 67 Palestinian students from three Palestinian high schools in the area of Bethlehem and 64 Jewish-Israeli students from three Jewish-Israeli high schools in Israeli towns participated in the workshops. Both populations were from a medium to high socio-economic status, secular and urban. In that sense, they were not representative of the total Israeli or Palestinian population.

The research questionnaires were anonymously filled out by all the participants before and after their participation in the workshop. Based on the demographic data, we were able to match the pre–post questionnaires for most of the participants. The research sample used in this study for the statistical analyses includes only those participants for whom we were able to do the matching of the before and after questionnaires with full confidence. Thus it includes 52 Jewish-Israeli participants (21 males and 31 females) and 48 Palestinian participants (26 males and 22 females) from the three workshops.

Research Methods

Data were collected¹ using quantitative as well as qualitative methods. Questionnaires measuring attitudes and stereotypic perceptions were administered to respondents before and after their participation in the workshop. Upon their arrival at the encounter site, and before the beginning of the activities, respondents were asked to complete self-report questionnaires. These examined their attitudes towards the intergroup encounter and other related issues.

¹ The author collected and analyzed the data, assisted by one Jewish-Israeli and one Palestinian research assistant.
Each respondent received a booklet that examined the extent to which respondents experienced contact with people from the other nation prior to their participation in the workshop, their motivation to participate in the encounter, their stereotypic perceptions of the other national group, and various demographic questions.

Immediately after the closing of the encounter, the respondents again answered the stereotypic perceptions and the demographic questionnaires. All the questionnaires were filled out anonymously. Jewish-Israeli participants received and answered the questionnaires in Hebrew; Palestinian participants received and answered the same questionnaires in Arabic after these were translated and back-translated to check for accuracy. Some 26 group and subgroup meetings were observed (at least eight different meetings were observed at each of the workshops investigated). Transcripts of these meetings were thematically analyzed. In addition, we conducted 32 interviews at different points of the process, with the Jewish and Palestinian participants, facilitators and organizers of the workshops, and analyzed thematically the transcripts of these interviews. We also analyzed project plans and documents.

Findings

Structure of Activities

The workshops were in many ways similar in terms of structure and forms of activity to other Jewish–Arab coexistence-aimed encounters conducted within Israel in the past 15 years (Bar & Bargal, 1995; Maoz, 1997, 2000a,b; Suleiman, 1997). After the opening plenary session, most of the workshop meetings were conducted in small mixed groups of 5–7 participants of each school. Two group-facilitators—an Israeli Jew and a Palestinian—jointly led these meetings. At the end of day one of the workshop, and again towards the end of day two, Jews and Palestinians from each subgroup met separately, in the form of a unination group led by the same nationality facilitator. The workshop ended with another plenary session.

The two-day encounters consisted of a series of dialogues between the youths. Two major practices can be identified within these encounters that are conducive to the creation of a transformative dialogue:

1. The contents of workshop activities reflected a gradual transition from activities centered on forming personal ties between youth from both sides to discussions of the conflict between the two national groups. The first day opened with games of getting acquainted, followed by a discussion of the culture, costumes and ways of living of each side and a discussion of school life. Beginning at the end of day one, a series of dialogues was conducted dealing with participants’ experience of the conflict and the relations between the sides. This structure was formed by the project organizers with the rationale of making a gradual transition from interpersonal, intercultural, social and dispute-free interactions at the opening of the workshop to ‘heavy’ conflict-laden discussions toward its end. Discussions of the conflict were introduced only when the participants could contain them without breaking the connections between them apart—only after the youth had got to know each other, discussed their similarities and formed social and interpersonal ties between them.

2. The crux of the transformative communication process was in a series of dialogue sessions beginning at the end of day one of the workshop in which participants were encouraged to share with
the other group members their experience of living in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The practice of narrating personal stories was used in these dialogues in order to enable youth to explore the group realities of the other side and to make it easier for them to feel empathy and to take into the self the experiences of the other (Gergen, 1999a; McNamee & Gergen, 1999a).

Did participation in the dialogue activities that followed the above principles actually transform the mutual perceptions and the relationship of both groups toward each other? To examine this question, we first turn to describe how the Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian youth perceived and related to each other at the outset of the workshop. Subsequently, we move to examine if these representations and ways of relating underwent change during and as a result of participation in the workshop dialogue sessions.

**Attitudes and Mutual Stereotypes at the Opening of the Workshop**

Analysis of the responses to the opening questionnaires shows that most of the participants (82.7% of the Jews and 80.4% of the Palestinians) arrived at the encounter without previously having met people of the other nationality on a social or personal basis, or having had only a very few such meetings. Most of them (88.5% of the Jews and 62.5% of the Palestinians) indicated that they did not have friends of the other nationality. The Jews reported having significantly fewer friends of the other nationality \( \chi^2 (2 \text{ d.f.}) = 3.31, p < 0.001 \).

Both Jewish and Palestinian students indicated high motivation for participating in the workshop, though this was significantly higher among the Palestinian youth \( (M = 4.00) \) than among their Jewish counterparts \( (M = 3.45) \) \( p < 0.031 \).

Important components in the interaction between groups in conflict comprise the mutual perceptions members of these groups have of each other. Groups in conflict tend to hold negative stereotypes and images of the other (Bar-Tal, 1997; Volkann, 1998). In the present study, we employed a relative criterion of negativity to determine the dimensions by which the intergroup perceptions are not reciprocal, meaning that one group views the other group more negatively than the other group views the first group. In this sense, reciprocal or symmetrical perceptions would exist if Jews perceived Palestinians as intelligent and good-hearted to the same extent as Palestinians perceived Jews. In our case, however, we find asymmetrical perceptions on both sides. A comparison between column 1 and column 3 in Table I shows that prior to their participation in the workshops, Jews perceived Palestinians as less intelligent and broad-minded than Palestinians perceived Jews. These differences were significant both for intelligent and broad-minded (at the minimal significance level set in this study for comparisons of ratings on stereotypic attributes of 0.01). These relatively negative perceptions are consistent with previous findings indicating that Jews tend to hold negative stereotypes of Arabs on the cognitive, educational and achievement dimensions (Levinson, Katz & El-Haj, 1995; Mahamid, 1981).

At the same time, Palestinians showed relatively negative perceptions of Jews on even more dimensions. Previous findings about stereotypes that Arabs have of Jews indicate negative perceptions on expressive, social and emotional dimensions (Levinson, Katz & El-Haj, 1995; Mahamid, 1981). Consistent with this, a comparison of column 3 and column 1 in Table I indicates that, prior to participation in the workshop, Palestinians saw Jews more negatively than Jews saw them on a number of social and interpersonal dimensions. These differences were significant with respect to the following attributes: friendly, good-hearted,
generous, considerate of others and, finally, willing to sacrifice for peace (Table I). These attributes are all highly relevant to the context of the Jewish–Palestinian peacebuilding interaction.

All in all, Palestinians showed higher motivation at the outset for meeting the Jews but also indicated significantly more negative stereotypic perceptions of the Jewish-Israeli out-group. As a minority, they combined unfavorable stereotypes of the Jewish majority group members together with a high desire to participate in an encounter with them. The Jews, on the other hand, expressed more favorable stereotypic perceptions of the Palestinians than the Palestinians held of them. However, while endorsing more favorable perceptions on the cognitive level of stereotypes, on the concrete immediate level of behavioral intentions, Jewish majority members wanted markedly less than their Palestinian counterparts to actually participate in an encounter with the students from the other side.

As our measures in the opening questionnaires were built on fixed statements and attributes defined by the researchers and rated by the participants, they do not enable us to tap images and perceptions of the other that may be spontaneously elicted by the sides. In the next section, we focus on this facet of the self-generated constructions of the other.

Expressions of Mutual Perceptions and Attitudes During the Encounter

The qualitative analysis of themes that emerged from the interview and meetings data also shows that Palestinians and Israeli Jews arrived at the encounter with very limited prior knowledge of the other side and with negative mutual perceptions.

However, the qualitative data elicited additional contents of images and constructions of the other that were not included in the questionnaires’ pre-defined attributes. These contents mainly centered on themes of threat and violence. Both Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian youth described themselves as having highly negative conceptions of the other as threatening, violent, murderous and inhuman.

| Table I. Jews’ and Palestinians’ Ratings of Each Other on Stereotypic Attributes Before and After Participation in the Workshop: Means (SD) |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Attribute      | Jews Before   | Jews After    | Palestinians Before | Palestinians After |
| Willing to sacrifice for peace | 2.65 (1.06) | 3.25 (0.97) | 2.09 (0.94)+ | 2.56 (1.31)+ |
| Open to changes | 2.67 (0.97) | 3.31 (0.97) | 2.91 (0.98) | 3.43 (1.27) |
| Tolerant       | 2.69 (0.98) | 3.65 (1.01) | 2.22 (0.96) | 2.89 (1.10)+ |
| Keeps promises | 2.69 (1.02) | 3.29 (1.07) | 2.15 (1.09) | 2.67 (1.17) |
| Honest         | 2.77 (1.01) | 3.31 (0.83) | 2.35 (0.99) | 2.56 (1.17)+ |
| Intelligent    | 2.88 (1.07)+ | 3.65 (0.79) | 3.51 (0.95) | 3.49 (1.08) |
| Broad-minded   | 2.90 (1.03)+ | 3.46 (0.91) | 3.58 (1.16) | 3.31 (1.37) |
| Considerate    | 2.91 (1.08) | 3.45 (0.90) | 2.25 (0.82)+ | 2.89 (1.22) |
| Good-hearted   | 3.02 (1.13) | 3.73 (0.87) | 2.23 (0.98)+ | 2.83 (1.04)+ |
| Generous       | 3.22 (1.14) | 3.65 (0.89) | 2.28 (0.89)+ | 2.72 (1.17)+ |
| Friendly       | 3.23 (0.94) | 3.85 (0.80) | 2.52 (0.85)+ | 2.98 (1.18)+ |

1. not at all; 5, to a very high extent. +, asymmetric mutual perceptions: a significant difference (p < 0.01) between Palestinians’ ratings of Jews and Jews’ ratings of Palestinians on this attribute at the time of measurement (before or after the workshop). The sign appears near the group that gave the lower ratings.
The Israeli Jews described the media – mainly Israeli television news – as a major and sometimes the only source of their information about Palestinians. Tali, a Jewish-Israeli female participant (JIF), said in one of the group meetings: 'This is what you see on television. Suleiman [refers to a Palestinian male participant] asked me if I was once in Bethlehem – I told him that I am afraid because that is what they show on television, they don't show anything – just frightening things.'

After having perceived Palestinians through the media, mainly as violent, wild and irrational terrorists and stone throwers, Jewish-Israeli participants expressed their surprise upon discovering, through the dialogue encounter, that Palestinian youth were similar to them in many respects, youth with which they could share experiences, dreams and desires. In the following accounts, Israeli Jews describe the transformative process that they went through in the encounter, in which both their representations of the Palestinian others and their emotions toward them underwent change approaching greater acceptance, understanding and inclusion of their Palestinian counterparts in the same category of the self.

Vered (JIF): 'The encounter showed me that the media is not always accurate, and that there are there also human beings, not like they describe them.' Yael (JIF): 'It is enough that I understood following the encounter that not all are mad and crazy like in the television. That there are people that are willing to speak logically.' Oded, a Jewish-Israeli male participant (JIM): 'In the beginning of the encounter we generalized that all Palestinians are murderers, all are stone throwers, all are haters of Israel, but they showed the opposite side from what we thought.' Perhaps the most moving description of the transformation in her relating to Palestinians as a result of the interaction in the workshop came from Dana, another Jewish female participant: 'I thought they were all against peace. This is what you see in television and at home, you grow in a society where they say that Palestinians are bad, that they are all the same. The media relayed to us only the negative things. Here, I saw that they are really similar to us, identical. The same dreams, only that they live like in jail.'

The following excerpt, taken from what Galit (JIF) said in a dialogue with the Palestinians, demonstrates to a chilling extent the strength and depth of Jewish youths' negative, degrading prior perceptions of the other side prior to the encounter: 'I discovered they are like us in the professions. Before I thought that all of them want to be bombers or cleaners – not you [addresses the Palestinian participants in the room, IM], I thought it was like this. Now I discovered that also you have professions like us in the future, that you want to study in the university.'

In their dialogues with the Israeli Jews, Palestinians expressed their awareness of how they are portrayed in the Israeli media, and attempted to explain to their Jewish counterparts that they are different than seen on television. Suleiman (a Palestinian male participant, PM): 'I understand that [the fear of the Jews from the Palestinians, IM], and the source is from television, and the media and the continuing policy of the Israeli government. And it disappears from the eyes that we differ personally from each other. You did not see the part that wants peace, only the part that wants to bomb.'

The Palestinians, on their part, came to the encounter carrying the image of the forceful harsh and violent Israeli soldier (Bilu, 1989). This image was created either through direct encounters they or their family members had with these soldiers or through mediated information such as accounts of other Palestinians on their experience with Israeli soldiers or television news reports (foreign networks). In the

2 All names were changed in the interest of anonymity.
different groups studied here, Palestinians described interactions with Israeli soldiers as involving violence and humiliation. Yusuf (PM): 'I fear from the army'. Suha (PF): 'My house looks over the checkpoint and I saw soldiers catching Palestinians, putting them against the wall.'

While Jews emphasize in their accounts the role of the encounter as changing their previous generalized violent image of Palestinians, we find no parallel emphasis on attitude change in accounts by Palestinians. Instead, and characteristically to the interaction between minority and majority groups (Maoz, 2000b; Moscovici, 1985; Mugny & Perez, 1991), Palestinians seem to concentrate more on bringing evidence that will change the attitudes of Jews, toward more complex representation of their minority group (Bar-On, 1999). They use two main routes to counter the generalized violent images Jews present of Palestinians.

First, they emphasize that not only are there terrorist Palestinians, but there are also other, nonviolent and peace-wanting individuals. Second, as we can see in the following excerpts, Palestinians point out to their Jewish counterparts that there are also violent subgroups among the Israeli Jews, and just as Israeli-Jews are afraid of Palestinians, Palestinians are afraid of Israeli soldiers. Suleiman (PM): 'Also we are afraid, you should see it [addresses the Jewish-Israeli participants, IM]. Two months ago, a child in the village of Lid, a soldier came and killed him with blows of the M16 gun, in front of people, in a very violent way. And a child like me is afraid to go out.' Vivian (PF): 'Many of your soldiers stop our innocent people when they want to go to work and shoot them. Shout stop, stop, and when they don’t – they shoot them.'

The accounts and expressions of the two sides, in the dialogues between them, reflect their major concern with images of self and other and with changes in attitudes toward each other: the Palestinians more as agents of change and the Jews taking the role of targets.

Changes in the ways the youth related to each other were not only reflected in their verbal accounts, but also in their actions and interactions with each other during the workshops as well as after its completion. Toward the end of the second day of one of the workshops, after having gone through a session in which they shared personal narratives of their lives in the conflict, Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian youth went together, during a break in the planned activities, to a balcony in the building where the workshop was held. This balcony overlooks a checkpoint through which many Palestinians pass back from Israel to the Palestinian Authority at the end of their day of work. Through their shared gaze on the checkpoint, Jewish-Israeli youth could enter for one moment the everyday experience of their Palestinian counterparts of making the transition from one territory to the other under the surveillance of Israeli soldiers.

The dialogic encounter between the youths also seemed to have some long-term behavioral effects. Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian youth continued to initiate moves toward shared experience even after the completion of the workshop.

Follow-up interviews that were conducted regarding the workshops' outcomes found that part of the Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian youth were still initiating shared activities, six months and one year after their participation in the workshops. These included mutual visits and meetings of small and larger groups of youths from both sides who had participated in the workshops.

After describing processes of attitude change that were reflected in participants' verbal accounts, as well as in their actions and interactions during and after the workshops, our next question is whether these processes of change were also manifested in quantitative before–after comparisons of participants' stereotypic perceptions of each other.
Stereotypic Perceptions at the Closing of the Workshops

Comparisons of respondents' ratings before and after participating in the workshops reveal remarkable changes in Jews' and Palestinians' stereotypic perceptions of each other.

While both the results of the opening questionnaires and the themes that emerged in the interviews and dialogues show that the students arrived at the workshops holding negative stereotypes of each other on many dimensions, students indicated much more favorable mutual perceptions following their participation in the intergroup process.

Table II indicates that both Jews' and Palestinians' ratings of each other changed significantly after the workshop on the following attributes: tolerant, good-hearted and considerate of others. A comparison between columns 1 and 2 and between columns 3 and 4 in Table I indicates that Jews, as well as Palestinians, rated each other more favorably after the workshop compared with before it. Palestinians' ratings of Jews on some of these attributes also became more favorable following the workshop (i.e. friendly, keeps promises and willing to sacrifice for peace). However, these differences were not large enough to reach the level of significance set for these comparisons.

If we return to the terms we used before of symmetrical and asymmetrical perceptions, our results show that the Jewish-Palestinian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Jews</th>
<th>Palestinians</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>t-test score</td>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>t-test score</td>
<td>Significance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(d.f.)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(d.f.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to sacrifice for peace</td>
<td>3.23 (51)</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>2.30 (45)</td>
<td>0.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open to changes</td>
<td>4.16 (50)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>1.95 (45)</td>
<td>0.057</td>
</tr>
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<td>Tolerant</td>
<td>5.61 (51)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>3.61 (45)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeps promises</td>
<td>3.12 (51)</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>2.48 (45)</td>
<td>0.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>3.81 (51)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>1.02 (45)</td>
<td>0.313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>4.86 (50)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>−0.10 (46)</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad-minded</td>
<td>3.13 (49)</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>−1.06 (47)</td>
<td>0.295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considerate</td>
<td>3.98 (50)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>3.22 (46)</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good-hearted</td>
<td>4.36 (51)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>3.03 (46)</td>
<td>0.004</td>
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<tr>
<td>Generous</td>
<td>2.46 (50)</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td>1.97 (45)</td>
<td>0.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>4.30 (51)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>2.25 (47)</td>
<td>0.029</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In all cases, except for the attributes intelligent and broad-minded in the Palestinian sample, pre-post differences are in the expected direction of more favorable post ratings. In all t-test results that reached significance, pre-post differences are in the expected direction. The minimum significance level set in this study for comparisons of ratings on stereotypic attributes is \( p = 0.01 \)
asymmetry in perceptions on affective and interpersonal attributes remained, even after participation in the intergroup process. A comparison of the mean ratings in columns 2 and 4 in Table I indicates that, following the workshop, Palestinians still saw Jews more negatively than Jews saw them on a number of dimensions, with some of them directly relevant to peacebuilding. The results of t-tests on independent samples indicate that these differences were significant in regard to the following attributes: honest, tolerant, friendly, good-hearted, generous, and, finally, willing to sacrifice for peace (see Table I).

Palestinians did rate Jews more favorably on these dimensions after the workshops compared with before it. However, two reasons can be suggested as to why, in spite of these favorable attitude changes, the negative asymmetry in ratings remained after the workshops. First, Jews began from a considerably higher starting point than Palestinians in their ratings of members of the other nation on these 'asymmetrical' attributes mentioned above. Thus, even the favorable change in Palestinian ratings on these attributes following the workshop did not suffice to close this initial gap. Second, Jews' pre–post attitude change following the workshop in regard to most of these attributes was much larger than the Palestinian attitude change, which, in most cases, did not even reach significance. In some cases, these differences between the sides’ magnitude of pre–post changes even caused the gap between their ratings to increase after the workshop.

Nevertheless, following the workshops, another asymmetry disappeared: Jews and Palestinians now rated each other as intelligent, and as broad-minded to a similar extent (Table I). Results indicate that this greater symmetry in mutual ratings is due to a combination of two factors: Jews' significantly increased favorability of ratings together with Palestinians' lack of change or even decrease in favorability of ratings following the workshop. Repeated ANOVA measures performed on the ratings of intelligent and of broad-minded, in which time of rating (pre or post) was the within-respondents factor and nationality of rater (Jew or Palestinian) was the between-respondents factor, found a significant effect to the interaction between time of rating and nationality of rater with respect to both measures ($F(1,96) = 9.41$, $p < 0.003$; and $F(1,96) = 7.19$, $p < 0.009$ for intelligent and broad-minded, respectively). Our results indicate that while Jews indicated significantly more favorable perceptions of Palestinians on these attributes after the workshops, Palestinians' ratings of Jews on these attributes did not change or even slightly decreased following the workshop.

Palestinian directors and facilitators of encounters with Jews often present the goal of empowering the Palestinian minority so that they would be able to look at Jews at eye level and not automatically accept their minority position as being one of the important goals of the workshops (Maoz, 2000b). The described pattern of findings regarding cognitive intellectual stereotypes may indicate that some empowerment of the Palestinian youth has actually occurred, so that at the completion of the workshops, after having closely interacted with Jewish-Israeli youth, they are less intellectually impressed by them.

In summary, and in line with themes and processes that emerged from the qualitative data, the quantitative pre–post analyses show marked attitude changes among workshop participants toward more favorable perceptions of each other. However, two points should be noted here in which the quantitative and the qualitative depart and in a sense complement each other. First, while in the dialogues it is the Jews that most prominently describe themselves as going through a process of attitude change, the above quantitative comparisons also show that Palestinian youth went through some changes in their
stereotypic perception of Jews, though indeed to a much lesser extent than was found for Jews. Second, as mentioned previously, while the qualitative data tapped spontaneously generated images of the violent other, the quantitative data concerned attitudes and changes in attitudes in other cognitive and interpersonal dimensions non-related to aggression or to violence.

Conclusion

Groups in conflict tend to hold negative stereotypes and attitudes and foster hostile emotions toward each other (Silverstein, 1989; Volkan, 1998; White, 1984; Yanai, 1996). Mutual negative perceptions also characterize sides in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, which is the focus of the present research. In a series of studies, Bar-Tal (1990, 1996) points to processes of mutual delegitimization that evolved against the background of the intractable conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and its history of mutual infliction of violence by the sides against each other. From early childhood, partisans in this conflict develop extreme negative stereotypes of each other, perceiving the other as inhuman, violent and threatening.

Negative images and stereotypes are often reflected and perpetuated by mass socialization processes carried on by state institutes, the media, educational systems and educational textbooks (Bar-Tal, 1997, 1998). The signing of peace agreements does not automatically annihilate these negative constructions. To change these unfavorable portrayals, a bottom-up psychological process of change in perceptions and relations has to take place (Bar-Tal, 2000; Kelman, 1999).

The present study investigated processes of Israeli–Palestinian peacebuilding at the grass-roots level, processes that have scarcely been studied before. The study focused on transformative dialogue workshops between Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian youth and examined the impact of this dialogical contact between the groups on how they perceived each other.

The quantitative as well as qualitative results show that youth from both sides arrived at the workshops with very limited past acquaintance with each other and holding negative mutual stereotypes.

Jewish-Israeli participants repeatedly described in their accounts the image of the violent, inhuman Palestinian terrorist. The Palestinian participants, on their part, prominently described the violent encounter between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian civilians. It seems, thus, that both Israeli and Palestinian youth arrived at the encounter threatened by the other side, and traumatized as a result of the past violent encounters between the sides.

Qualitative analysis of major themes that had appeared repeatedly in the workshop process shows that against the background of these negative emotions and experience the workshops’ dialogical encounter enabled the youths to interact on a personal level. Processes of attitude change through personalized interaction with the Palestinians were prominently described by the Jewish-Israeli participants. The Palestinians, in their dialogue with the Jews, concentrated on changing the latter’s perceptions of them and of the conflict between the sides.

The quantitative results of the pre–post comparisons show that after participation in the workshops, each group’s perceptions of the other became significantly more favorable on various dimensions, such as ‘considerate of others’ and ‘tolerant’, which are directly relevant to processes of creating cooperative relations between the two sides.

It should be noted, though, that casual inference from pre–post differences is problematic without the inclusion of a control group in the research. However, to some extent, two points justify our inclination to
see the pre–post differences as related to participation in the workshop.

First, at least in the case of our Jewish sample, the quantitative results of more favorable perceptions toward Palestinians following the workshops match the results of the qualitative analysis pointing to processes of favorable attitude change among the Israeli Jews. The Israeli students' spontaneous accounts during the workshops, describing their favorable attitude change as a result of their participation in the encounter, lend convergent validity to the quantitative findings of the pre–post changes in attitudes.

Second, the three workshops studied here were held on different dates during May and June 1998. A survey of newspaper headlines from these dates found no occurrence of a news event that could be assumed to bring about favorable attitude change among the sides. Furthermore, in analyses separately performed for each workshop, similar patterns of attitude change were found in most cases for each of the three different-dated workshops. In this sense, we have three mini-replications of our 'experiment in peace' that, in spite of the small Ns involved, revealed consistent pre–post participation differences in most cases. This considerably weakens the alternative explanations, which suggest that the change in attitudes could be a result of some outside event that occurred on a specific date, or be caused by another factor unrelated to participation in the workshop.

Nevertheless, although technical problems prevented the use of a control group in this study, it is strongly recommended that future evaluations of such workshops include control groups of some kind in order to strengthen the extent to which the results from this study can lead to clear inference.

For example, unstructured contact between youths from both sides may have produced the same effects as the practices of transformative dialogue used in this study. Therefore, a research design that includes a control group experiencing unstructured contact might be helpful in determining the source of the attitude change effects. It is also recommended that future studies of peacebuilding interventions are carried out with whole schools rather than with individuals from selected classes. A relevant example can be found in other studies that have assigned whole schools to receive tolerance-promotion activities and compared the changes in the entire school population with the changes in schools where no promotion was conducted (Liebkind & McAlister, 1999).

In this study, we presented an experiment in peacebuilding, asking whether a transformative dialogue could be effective in the context characterized by conflictual relations, by occasional incidents of violence inflicted by each side against the other and by stagnation in the political peace process. The results show that such a transformative contact event is important, if not necessary, in laying the grounds for the ability of sides that are in acute conflict to understand each other and to cooperate.

These results have important theoretical as well as practical implications for recent discussions of the boundaries of effectiveness of transformative dialogue or contact that try to identify problematic conditions of the macro-relationship between the sides, such as an ongoing conflict or a sharp asymmetry in power relations, under which transformative practices may become irrelevant or ineffective (Lannamann, 1999; McNamee & Gergen, 1999b; Pettigrew, 1998). Our results show that transformative practices can still be effective, and possibly even more relevant, in the harsh context of a violent conflictual sociopolitical reality.

In terms of the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998), these results show that intergroup contact can improve attitudes, even under the conditions of realistic conflict over scarce resources (LeVine & Campbell, 1972), that still exist.
between the Israelis and the Palestinians. However, it must be noted that, like most of the interventions and studies of transformative contact, the present study deals with a short-term event (Pettigrew, 1998), on the micro level, that involved a limited number of youth participants. The question still remains for future research – can such micro events of transformative dialogue have any influence in the long term on wider societal processes of peacebuilding and reconciliation?

References


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