Counseling Groups for Arab Adolescents in an Intergroup Conflict in Israel:

Report of an Outcome Study

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September. 10, 2005

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Abstract

This study aimed at evaluating the impact of group counseling on Arab Israeli adolescents of different religions—Muslim, Druze, and Christian. The study involved 474 Arab secondary students from 17 Arab schools and 17 Arab novice school counselors. The dependent variables were level of anxiety, level of empathy, attitudes endorsing aggression, and self-identity (Arab, religious, and Israeli identities). A pre-post-experimental-control design was employed to assess the effectiveness of the intervention. Data was analyzed in a hierarchical model (mixed) with individual being the first level and ethnicity and Group (experimental/control) being the second level. Results indicated increased empathy and decreased endorsement of aggression in the Christian ethnic group; reduced anxiety and religious identity in the Muslim ethnic group; and an increased Israeli identity in both the Druze and the Christian groups.

Key words: intergroup conflict, adolescents, group intervention, group counseling
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This study focuses on an intergroup conflict between Arabs and Jews in Israel. A group counseling intervention was designed for Arab adolescents with the aim of helping them explore the conflict within a supportive climate and of enhancing their understanding of the Jewish narrative. These two goals may enhance a peace process for them. The kinds of group work includes educational, counseling, and psychotherapy groups (Gazda, Ginter, & Horne, 2001; Gladding, 2003). While most of the school-based group interventions, including peace education programs, may be considered educational groups because they focus on a unique content or on skills training, we employed a counseling group intervention that focuses on the well being of Arab adolescents, allowing the release of negative emotions and stress, enhancing self-identity, and increasing the understanding of the Jewish narrative. It should be stated at the outset that Arab adolescents were selected because there was an opportunity, not because we think they need such intervention more than Jewish adolescents. Although this is a politically oriented study, its primarily goals were to help Arab adolescents cope with their current stress, and to scientifically explore the effectiveness of such intervention delivered by school counselors.

The Jewish-Arab conflict in Israel is a conflict among groups that share one small country but differ in religion, language, and ethnicity. This conflict entails two major aspects: a sociopolitical and a socio-psychological aspect, reciprocally interrelated (Salomon, 2004). Although the current study focuses on the psychological aspects of the conflict, it is impossible to ignore the influence of the political aspects, particularly because the intervention was conducted during a bloody conflict between
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Israelis and Palestinians, called the Second Intifada (uprising), which was—and still is—having a devastating impact on coexistence in Israel.

In intractable, long-standing conflicts, psychological dynamics play an essential role. They deeply involve society members, who develop a psychological repertoire of beliefs, attitudes, and emotions about their goals, the causes of the conflict, the rival, and the desired solution. Of special importance in this repertoire are widely shared beliefs, which sometimes become part of a social ethos, or a collective narrative. When such an ethos justifies the continuation of the conflict and de-legitimizes the opponent, it becomes a major threat to coexistence (Bar-Tal, 2004).

Collective narratives are the comprehensive collection of stories, beliefs, aspirations, histories, and current explanations that a group holds about itself and about its surroundings. Collective narratives are prime devices for providing the group with a sense of shared identity and the individual with a sense of social identity. Collective narratives play a particularly important role in times of conflict. They protect a group’s members from the devastating impact of trauma and offer the means to assist the process of healing. At the same time, they provide interpretations of events that negate those of the other group. Thus, although persons identified with a specific group are indeed empowered through their group membership, they may lose, at the same time, support from the larger society (Dunbar, 1997). This is the case in the current situation in Israel, which puts the Arab group in unfavorable conditions for emotional well-being.

Yet, not all of the Arabs in Israel are deprived of the support of the larger society. It is a mistake to refer to all Arabs as a single minority, argues Abu-Nimar (2004); there are various groups of Muslims, Christians, and Druze, who differ in religion, customs, traditions, and social norms. For example, the Druze serve in the
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Israeli Army and tend to assume more multiple identities (e.g., Druze and Israeli), which elicits positive attitudes toward them from the larger society. Relations with the Druze, therefore, are free of anxiety; Israeli Jews can relate to them with empathy, and vice versa (Stephan & Finlay, 2000). The opposite characterizes relations between Jews and the two other ethnic groups.

*The effectiveness of peace education programs*

Nevo and colleagues (Nevo, Salomon, & Brem, 2002) reported that only one third of the approximately 300 peace education (PE) intervention programs reported in the literature in the last 20 years included evaluations of their effectiveness. In one such analysis, Sagy and colleagues (2000) studied the extent to which Israeli and Palestinian youths perceive the legitimacy of salient items in each other's collective narrative (e.g., the Holocaust for the Jews). Both sides showed little empathy for the other's narrative, and both expressed great anger toward it. Another study reported on a survey of peace educators in Israel (Nevo et al., 2002). A major finding was that the attaining of a deeper understanding and appreciation of the other side's collective narrative was perceived as the foremost goal for peace education of 25 goals listed for a Jewish target population, and placed second for a Palestinian target population. Accepting another’s narrative need not mean abandoning one's own. It means, rather, the acknowledgement of the other narrative's right to exist, the acceptance of its validity on its own terms (Salomon, 2004).

Several studies reporting encouraging results led to recommendations for the current research project. Biton (2002) studied 800 Jewish and Palestinian high school students, half of whom participated in a peace education program integrated into regular subject-matter classes during the Intifada. He found that participation in the program tended to lead to more positive and conciliatory perceptions of the concept of
peace; this was true of both Jewish and Arab participants. On the other hand, non-participation led to an increase in the number of Palestinian youths who advocated war as a means to attain peace. Lustig (2003) found that the study of a remote interethnic conflict (in this case, the Irish) helped Israeli youngsters become more willing to acknowledge the two-sided nature of the narratives involved in the local conflict. Hertz-Lazarowitz (2004) presents successful results emanating from a five-year action-research project of systemic change toward coexistence in the mixed Arab-Jewish city of Acre. The project was successful until the second Intifada erupted. A process study conducted by Maoz (2004) found that asymmetry of power was a major problem; therefore, she also recommends intervention in separate groups. Finally, modes of interventions have been discussed in relation to the type of group. For example, Rouhana & Korper (1997) argue that confrontations are less appropriate for the Arab culture. Stephan & Stephan (2001) agree that confrontations may be problematic, particularly when used with younger children. The following program was designed based on the recommendations surveyed above.

Actually, most of the recent literature suggests that interventions should take place in segregated, that is, ethnically homogeneous, groups. Suleiman (2004), taking a social-psychological perspective, contends that the Arab-Israeli conflict is characterized by asymmetric majority-minority relations, which imposes difficulties on encounter groups. Such groups require interpersonal communication and the expression of individual and group identities, which are difficult to achieve in asymmetric relationships. He brings the example of a strategy used at the School of Peace in Neveh Shalom (Halabi, 2004), in which the groups involved in a dialogue hold separate meetings. This approach appears to be effective in encouraging group members to assert their collective identities and in legitimizing these identities in the
eyes of outgroup members. The outcome is especially important for members of
Israel’s Muslim minority, who have a greater need to assert their national identity,
according to Suleiman. Similarly, Abu-Nimer (2004) advises that separate programs
should be conducted for Arab and Jews because of their different needs and priorities.
A separate program for Arabs would boost their confidence to express themselves, he
says.

School is an important agent for education for coexistence. The school-age
generation is still in the process of acquiring a psychological repertoire and, as such,
is more open to new ideas and information. Yet this is no easy task. When negative
relations are based on the ethnocentrism of one or both groups, education for
coexistence can succeed because its aim is mainly to change beliefs, norms, and
attitudes. In contrast, coexistence in the case of an intractable conflict can play only a
supportive catalytical role that accelerates the process; it cannot by itself play a major
role (Bar-Tal, 2004). When the peace process is accompanied by military
confrontation, the rhetoric of conflict, and hostile acts, education for coexistence has
little chance of succeeding. In this case, the only role for education is to encourage
critical thinking and develop empathy for the suffering of the rival group. Other
expectations of short-term programs would be unrealistic; and even if successful,
Bar-Tal (2004) and Salomon (2004) argue, they would probably not withstand the
widely shared, separate collective narratives.

Due to the bloody circumstance in which the study took place, co-existence groups
were not possible. It had to be an intervention within an ethnically homogeneous
group, small enough to permit a safe climate, and include counseling methods that
allow emotional self-expression.
The proposed intervention

The goals of the program were as follows. First was to enhance the well-being of Arab youth through self-expression in a safe environment. The assumption was that the exploration of identity issues would extend their sense of self-identity to include more of the Israeli identity and to decrease the level of negative emotions toward the rival group. A second goal was to increase empathy for the Jewish narrative by exposure to the suffering of the other group. Through imparting knowledge and through experiential learning, we hoped to increase the Arab youths’ acknowledgement of the past and present suffering of the Jewish people.

The program is based on a counseling intervention of an atheoretical (integrative) nature (Hill, 2005), also used in groups with children and adolescents (Shechtman, 2004). Accordingly, the change process consists of cognitive and affective explorations, insight, and action. Affective exploration is particularly important in this change process, as it leads to emotional experiencing—a key element in any personal growth (Greenberg, 2002). The counselor must be skilled in leading such individual and group processes. Group working conditions must include the therapeutic factors of group cohesion, catharsis, and interpersonal learning, in order to permit participants to express themselves openly, and the group to respond with support and acceptance. Listening to the narratives of a rival group is particularly difficult and requires empathic listening skill.

The study employed a pre-post experimental-control design. The hypotheses were that when compared to the control group, the experimental group would show the following: a decrease in the level of anxiety toward Jews; an increase in empathy toward Jews’ suffering; a decrease in attitudes endorsing aggression; and an expansion of Israeli identity.
Method

Population

The study took place during the "Second Intifada" (2003) and involved 474 students (220 male and 254 female) from 17 different schools in the Arab educational section in Israel. It included three ethnic groups: Christians \( n = 101 \), Moslems (247), and Druze (126). The schools involved are located in various parts of the country, both rural areas and cities, thus representing the Arab population in Israel. While all three ethnic groups belong to the Arab population, they vary by religion, tradition, social norms, and attitude toward the State of Israel. Participants ranged in age from 12 to 17 \( (M = 14.62, SD = 1.5) \); in schooling, from sixth to tenth grades.

Seventeen graduate students in a university counseling program conducted the intervention as part of their program requirements, each in the school where they did their practicum. Their ages ranged from 25-58 \( (M = 36.24, SD = 8.8) \); they all had some experience in teaching \( (M = 12.94, SD = 10.1) \).

The Program

The intervention consisted of two major components: (a) encouragement of self-expression in regard to participants' multiple identities and their feelings toward the Jews; (b) enhancement of empathy toward the Jewish narrative.

The first two sessions focused on the establishment of a positive group climate and rules for supportive interpersonal interactions. Several ice-breaker activities were used to foster a climate of interpersonal intimacy. A structured activity to enhance the expression of feelings was used ("The Feeling Wheel") to stress the legitimization of feeling expression. In this activity participants spin the wheel and stop it on the feeling they want to share. Finally group rules were established based on the
"Personal Needs in a Group" activity. In this activity each participant writes down behaviors in the group that he or she considers helpful or disturbing to the group process. This information becomes the basis for the group rules.

Sessions 3-5 focused on the issue of social identity. In accordance with narrative therapy, participants were encouraged to tell their dominant story (an incident they felt strongly about) in relation to social identity, and group participants were trained to respond by empowering the speaker, providing emotional feedback and mutual sharing. In Session 3, each participant then wrote a personal incident related to the Arab-Jewish conflict and completed sentences, such as: “I am angry …”; “I am afraid…”(session 3). Session 4 focused on multiple social identities. The purpose of this session was to extend social identity so that the Israeli nationality is included. Each participant prepared an "identity card" that responded to the question of "Who am I?" (e.g., Arab, Israeli, Muslim, etc.) and wrote a sentence or two about his/her feelings about that identity. The discussion focused on these feelings, on relevant disturbing issues, and on things that needed to be changed. The "thorn identity" was discussed in the fifth session. Two stories were used to facilitate the discussion, one of an Arab soldier who volunteered to serve in the Israeli army and the other of an Arab family that was hit by a terror attack. In both stories the participants were dealing with the Arabs' multiple and conflicting identities.

Sessions 6 to 8 were aimed at enhancing empathy toward the Jewish narrative. In Session 6, a movie on the Holocaust was shown to provide information on Jewish history. Then, in Session 7 a role-play was used to facilitate understanding of the Arab-Jewish conflict from a Jewish perspective. Finally, in Session 8 a letter written by a Jewish mother who had lost her child in a terror attack was read, to which each
participant had to respond with a personal letter to this mother. The focus of the discussion was on empathy.

The final two sessions were used to summarize the learning and experiences, enhance understanding of the conflict, provide feedback on the intervention, and say good-bye to each other.

**Instruments**

(1) *The Intergroup Anxiety Scale* (Stephan & Stephan, 1985) measures the level of anxiety about a rival group. The scale consists of 11 different feelings (e.g., afraid, friendly, secure), translated into Arabic and back translated by one of the present authors. Participants were asked to evaluate the degree to which they have each feeling when interacting with an out-group (i.e., Jewish) member. Possible responses ranged from 1 (I do not feel like this at all) to 10 (I strongly feel like this). A total score consisted of the mean of evaluations (range = 1-10) with the higher score representing higher anxiety. Internal reliability in the present study was .85. The scale was administered before intervention and two weeks after termination of the group.

(2) *The Index of Empathy for Children and Adolescents* (Bryant, 1982) describes emotional reactions in varying situations, measuring the level of empathy. Participants are asked to indicate the accuracy of each of 22 statement in terms of their own emotional state along a seven-point scale (from 1 = not at all, to 7 = very accurate). As the focus of this study was intergroup relations, we used only 10 relevant items of the questionnaire, four of which were revised to relate to the Arab-Jewish conflict. Such modification had already been employed in a former study (Shechtman & Bashir, 2005). All items were translated into Arabic and back translated by one of the authors. Revised items read, for example: "When I see a bus blowing up, I am sad"; I am happy that Saddam is threatening Israel." Scores ranged from 1-7, with the higher
score representing higher empathy. Internal consistency of the scale in the present study was .75. The scale was administered before intervention and two weeks after termination of the group.

(3) Revised Normative Beliefs Measure (Huesmann & Guerra, 1997). This 20-item instrument measures endorsement of reactive aggression in terms of specific and general beliefs. The first part of the questionnaire contains 12 scenarios entailing a physical or verbal provocation between two children, and the second part contains eight general questions regarding the endorsement of aggression. In the present study, we used three scenarios of the first part of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was translated into Arabic and back translated by an Arab speaking professional and was used in a previous study (Shechtman & Bashir, 2005). Each question suggests two options of response -- verbal and physical -- thus creating a scale of six items. For example: “Suppose a Jewish boy says something bad to an Arab boy, Ali. 1. Do you think it’s OK for Ali to yell at him? 2. Do you think it’s OK for Ali to hit him?” In all the three scenarios, the provocateur was Jewish. Answers were yes (1)/no (0). Their mean was used as the total score, with a higher score representing a higher level of support for aggressive response. The internal consistency in the current study was .76. The scale was administered before intervention and two weeks after termination of the group.

(4) The Personal Dimensions of Differences (PDD) (Dunbar, 1997) was used to measure self-identity. The scale measures multiple identities in seven categories (age, ethnicity, gender, race, religion sexual orientation, and socio-economic status); on three dimensions: ascribed group identity (i.e., how similar one is to the group), personal empowerment by means of group membership (i.e., how much power one
gets from belonging to the group), and perceived social support for group membership (i.e., to what extent one feels supported by the group).

In the current study, our focus was on ethnicity (Arab and Jewish) and religion. We eliminated race and economic status but kept age and gender in order to mask the focus of the questionnaire. Thus, there were three questions:

(1) “To what extent do you identify yourself as a member of”: (a) age group, (b) Arab nationality, (c) gender, (d) religion, and (e) Israeli nationality. Responses to this question were rated on a three-point scale (not at all, to some extent, very much) with the higher score representing higher identity.

(2) “Some people feel that they are empowered by belonging to a group. To what extent do you gain power from belonging to each of the five groups?”

Responses were on a 4-point scale, with the higher score representing a higher sense of empowerment.

(3) “How much power do you get from the larger society (i.e., Israel) by belonging to your group?”

Responses here were measured on a 4-point scale, with the higher score representing more power. The score on each sub-scale (Arab, religious, and Israeli) was derived from the mean of the three relevant items (age and gender were eliminated). Due to the different scales of the item (1-3 and 1-4), a linear transformation was used to convert all scales into 1-3. Internal consistencies were: Arab \( \alpha = .70 \), Religious: \( \alpha = .76 \), Israeli: \( \alpha = .81 \). The scaled score was derived from the mean of each set of items, with a higher score representing a greater identification with the sub-identity. The scale was administered before intervention and two weeks after termination of the group.
This study was based on an intervention with Arab adolescents in Israel at the time of the second Palestinian uprising, known as the Second Intifada. A group of 17 Israeli Arabs admitted to the university on a special three-year school-counseling program chose as their final project to do an intervention related to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The program was developed by the two authors, with the cooperation of the school counselors participating in the program. Counselors underwent two 56-hour training courses. The first trained them in general group counseling processes and the second trained and supervised them on the implementation of the program. For the first three months of the second course, they acted as participants in the program and received guidance on its implementation. The rest of the time (five months), they discussed the implementation process and received group supervision. They all used the same structured program, but each student conducted the program in the school where they did their internship or where they were already employed. The 17 counselors included Muslims, Christians, and Druze, and they were matched to the students based on their ethnicity (e.g., Muslim counselors worked with Muslim students).

The counselors selected one class and divided it into experimental and control conditions, with every second student on the classroom list being assigned to the experimental group. The experimental group then received 10 counseling sessions based on this program, while the control group remained with their homeroom teacher for social activities.

Questionnaires were administered before the treatment and a month after its termination. Each student also transcribed three sessions of the program, based on tape-recorded sessions. The two authors read all the transcripts to check for adherence.
to the program. Only one intervention was eliminated from this study because the process had not been adequately implemented.

**Results**

This study had two levels: the individual and the group. Due to the assumed dependency of the scores on each variable in each group, data were analyzed in a hierarchical model (mixed models; Hox, 2002; Singer, 1988) of two levels: the first being the individual and the second being Ethnicity and treatment Group (experimental/control). That is, the individual was nested within the groups. In the Mixed procedure a random effect is added to all participants in a group, which characterizes their group. This random effect is *assessed* by the researcher in addition to the regular explanatory variable that can be *measured* by the researcher.

The analyses involved three stages: First, pre-test differences were examined by Ethnicity, Group (experimental / control) and their interaction (3 x 2 model), with the specific group being the random effect. It should be noted that both independent variables were group level variables; as a result, the analyses have relatively small degrees of freedom, disallowing the inclusion of many independent variables. Second, in the interest of reducing the number of variables in the main analyses we examined the effects of group size, child’s age, child’s gender, therapist’s age and therapist’s gender, each at a time, in a hierarchical model, on pre-post gains. Third, pre-post gains were examined by Ethnicity, Group (experimental / control) and the interaction (3 x 2 hierarchical model).

**Preliminary Analyses**

Based on the literature review, we expected differences among the three ethnic groups. A hierarchical examination of pre-test differences by Ethnicity, Group
(experimental / control) and the interaction (3 x 2 model) indicated that ethnicity had a significant effect on empathy and identity (Arab, religious and Israeli), marginally significant for anxiety, and non-significant for normative beliefs (see Table 1).

*Insert Table 1 about Here*

Assessing the contrasts between each pair of ethnic origins (see Table 2) showed that Druze tended to be different than Christians and Muslims: They were higher on empathy, religious identity and Israeli identity than both Christians and Muslims, lower on anxiety than Muslims, and lower on Arab identity than Christians and Muslims. These results suggested including ethnicity as part of the main analyses, conducting them with the post-pre difference score as the dependent variable, with the pre-score serving as a covariate.

*Insert Table 2 about Here*

The second stage, as mentioned above, involved an examination of the effects of group size, child’s age, child’s gender, therapist’s age and therapist’s gender, each at a time, in a hierarchical model, on pre-post gains. This analysis was performed in order to rule out possible intervening variables. Each model had the gain score as the dependent variable and the independent variables were: Ethnicity, Group and the Ethnicity x Group interaction (group level), Pre-score as a covariate (individual level), and one of - group size, child’s age, therapist’s age and therapist’s gender (group level), and child’s gender (individual level). None of these background variables was found significant (see Table 3) and they were therefore excluded from the analyses of the main effects.

*Insert Table 3 about Here*
Main Effects

As mentioned above, pre-post differences were examined by Ethnicity, Group (experimental / control) and the interaction (3 x 2) in a hierarchical model (mixed model). The individual level included the gains and the pre-score covariates, whereas the group level included Ethnicity and Group. The specific group was the random effect. Pre-post scores are presented in table 4.

*Insert Table 4 about Here*

For Christians scores increased in empathy and in Israeli identity and decreased in anxiety and attitudes in the experimental group; in the control groups empathy actually decreased. The Muslims have decreased the level of anxiety in the experimental group while it increased in the control group. only one difference was observed for the Druze participants. The results of the statistical analyses are reported in Table 5.

*Insert Table 5 about Here*

Group by Ethnicity interaction was found significant on five of the six variables. For Christians in experimental groups scores significantly increased on empathy and Israeli identity and decreased on attitudes endorsing aggression, compared with Christians in the control groups. For Muslims in experimental groups scores decreased on anxiety and religious identity. Druze in experimental groups increased in Israeli identity. For the significant interactions Etas ranged from .03 to .07, indicating a limited magnitude of change.

Discussion

This study aimed at evaluating the impact of group counseling on Arab adolescents in Israel. Based on our understanding that Arabs in Israel do not form one minority
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group (Abu-Nimar, 2004), and based on the ethnic difference on the initial scores, we analyzed the data with ethnicity being an independent variable. We expected to find a decrease in anxiety and in attitudes endorsing aggression, and an increase in empathy and Israeli identity.

General changes

Results indicated differential changes by ethnicity. Of the three groups, the Druze showed the least change (only an increase in Israeli identity), the Muslims showed change on two variables (a reduction in anxiety and in religious identity), and the Christians showed the most change (an increase in empathy, reduction in endorsement of aggression, and increase in Israeli identity). Ethnicity and the intervention appear to be the strongest factors affecting the results, more than age, gender, and group size.

Empathy

Increase in empathy was expected due to the characteristics of the program. Both release of anger and being exposed to the painful narrative of the Jewish people were expected to increase empathy. Moreover, the counseling techniques employed were geared to achieve such a goal. The fact that the Druze did not gain in empathy is understandable considering their initially high scores on empathy, as well as on all other measures that favor the Jewish people.

Empathy was enhanced for the Christians but not for the Muslims. Thus, the very emotional film and activities could not overcome the anger and hatred that Muslims feel toward the Jews. Developing empathy and acceptance of the narrative of a rival group may not be expected in a short-term group-counseling intervention, particularly under the current conditions of bloody conflict between the two groups (Bar-Tal, 2004;; Salomon, 2004; White-Stephan et al., 2004). The Muslims more than
the Christians are involved in this conflict; first, because the uprising Arabs are Muslims and second, because religion may play an important role. So, even though Christians and Muslims started the intervention with similar scores on empathy, change was harder to achieve among the Muslim participants. Educational efforts seem too weak to withstand more general beliefs and the ethos of the specific group to which participants belong, as has been suggested (Bar-Tal, 2004; Salomon, 2004).

Anxiety

Anxiety was decreased in both the Christian and the Muslim groups. It is not surprising that Muslims, who gain power from membership in the Arab group but are denied the support of the general society, find it hard to be less anxious and more empathic even with intervention efforts (Dunbar, 1997). In light of these circumstances, the reduction in anxiety for the Muslim adolescents who participated in the counseling groups is an important outcome. Moreover, note the increase in the level of anxiety for the Muslims in the control group, which may be attributed to the increased identification of Muslims with the Palestinian struggle that reached its peak during the year of the intervention.

We tend to attribute this gain mainly to the first component of the intervention. For several sessions these youngsters released anger and talked about emotions in an accepting and supportive climate. Peer support may serve as a buffer against anxiety. But perhaps, the second component contributed to the reduction of anxiety as well. In these several sessions the Jewish narrative was exposed as weak and hurt, very different from the general image which Arab children have of the "strong Israeli soldier caring a gun".

Beliefs Endorsing Aggression
While no differences between the groups on this measure were evidenced on the pre-scores, the Christians decreased their level of endorsement of aggression, following the intervention. This is an important outcome, as attitudes endorsing aggression are related to actual aggressive behavior (Heusmann & Guerra, 1997).

Identity

Initially, Muslims scored the highest on Arab identity, however, no change was found on Arab identity in any of the groups. In contrast, Muslims reduced the religious identity, and Christians and Druze increased the Israeli identity. Although the reduction of religious identity in the Muslim group was not expected it may be related to gains in anxiety, as religious identity was initially negatively correlated with anxiety. The increase in Israeli identity in the Christian group may perhaps explain the positive impact of the program in this group.

Overall, progress is not impressive, as many have speculated (e.g., Bar-Tal, 2004; Salomon, 2004). However, the results show that intervention efforts are not useless. To understand what worked in the process, we now turn to an exploration of the content of the meetings.

Analysis of sessions

As mentioned, the program entailed three major topics: expression of feelings toward the rival group, the exploration of self-identity, and the acknowledgement of the Jewish narrative. Each of these components was represented by one transcribed session (a total of three sessions per group). The order of these components is congruent with integrative theories (Hill, 2005). Initially, clients need to express negative emotions and be accepted, regardless of the content of such emotions. Only after they are heard can they develop self awareness and empathy with others. Enhancing empathy with a rival group is not an easy task, as it involves emotions and
motivation that are not readily available at the time of a conflict because of the high level of anxiety involved (Stephan & Conolay, 2000). Indeed, the first stage was characterized by very negative and antagonistic reactions. Participants mentioned anger, fear, despair, hate, helplessness, and depression. One area of despair is their lives as *Israeli citizens*. They feel that the Jews took away their land, and now they, the Arabs, live in uncertainty and experience injustice. They feel that the authorities do not treat them fairly, that there is no equality between the two groups, and that there are no opportunities for them to progress in life. Jews are suspicious of all Arabs, they say; and want to get rid of them. Many of these perceptions are based on the reality in which they live (White-Stephan et al., 2004).

Another major issue that almost every participant mentioned was the violence in the Palestinian territory and in Iraq. Israeli Arabs feel part of the Palestinian people and are torn between their two identities. Thus, although they are citizens of Israel, they perceive themselves as victims and the Israelis as powerful bullies. "For every Jew killed, they kill 10, and the world is silent," said one participant. It is quite disturbing to face their need for revenge: "If only the Arabs would be courageous enough to wipe-out the state of Israel" was a repeated wish, along with such expressions as, "We will never surrender to the Jews " and “Let them all go to hell.” Similarly, they often view terrorists as "Shahids" (martyrs), who are justifiably taking revenge.

In the second stage of the program, the focus was on the Holocaust and Terror in Israel. The movie and the mother who lost a child in a terror attack elicited different reactions. Many showed distrust toward the Holocaust, felt that it was an Israeli invention to justify their aggression and to extort money, and wished that Jews had disappeared ("I am sorry that Hitler did not fully accomplish his task"; "I am not
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sorry for the baby, every baby is a future soldier"). Many also raised the question of how a people who had suffered so much could cause another people to suffer, and they drew parallels between the Holocaust and the war in the Palestinian territory: "What is the difference between the two, only the methods have changed."

At the same time, there were also many empathic reactions: "It was very disturbing to see the little boy so frightened"; "It was hard seeing the father having to separate from his family"; "I was moved by the doll the girl was holding." The reactions to the mother who had lost her daughter in the bus attack were very sympathetic: "I know it hurts"; "I was moved by your trauma, wish you would be strong"; "I felt like crying"; "There is no justification to a horror like this."

Not only were the reactions emotional and empathic, some of their perceptions changed following these three sessions. "Now I understand that the Jewish people went through a major trauma and it is not easy to live with such memories"; "I can see now that both sides are suffering"; "I can see now why the Jews do not wish to suffer anymore."

Another interesting process was the emotional identification that some adolescents experienced. In reaction to the movie, one girl shared the story of her separation from her father because of her parents’ divorce, and talked about her loss. Another pupil reacted to the movie like this: "It reminds me of the stories my mother and grandma tell about the way they lost their home when the Israeli army took away their land." Such emotional experiences are powerful catalysts in the process of change (Greenberg, 2002).

An interesting group dynamic that emerged was the mutual exchange of information, as well as attempts to correct or argue a different view. A girl responds to another who expresses a desire for revenge: "I disagree with you; nobody should be
suffering that much." Another response to someone who said that every Jewish child was a future soldier: "By the same token, the Jews should kill every child and woman because that child is the terrorist of tomorrow, and she is his mother." In another verbal exchange, a pupil says: "You cannot ignore history, the Holocaust did take place." There were even more courageous responses, although sparse: "If I could choose, I would prefer living under Israeli authority rather than Palestinian." It appears that the group climate was safe enough for participants to express diverse feelings and opinions, suggesting that positive interpersonal learning might have occurred (Yalom, 1995).

In the final stage (summary), many were still antagonistic, but some felt they had changed their perceptions. "I felt good that I could first talk about myself, express our pain, then I could think about the other group; now I understand that not all the Jews killed my uncle, that there are also Jews who want to live in peace." "I understand now that I also received quite a lot from the country; we are living in one of the most advanced countries, and we all benefit from it." Even: "Why do you think Israeli soldiers are killed if not to protect civilians, and you are among them." "Where is your loyalty to the country that protects you, if you are happy with every soldier that is killed." Some even called for action: "We, the youth, need to do something to help with the negotiation process." The reactions at the end of the program, which were clearly different from those at the initial stage, support the validity of the program’s ability to make a difference, at least for some participants. They also suggest that the emotional component had a strong impact and may explain the gains in the acceptance of the Jewish narrative.

There were expected differences among the ethnic groups. While Muslims and Christians feel they are part of the Palestinian people, the Druze do not. As one
Druze girl argued: "Arabic is only a language for me. I live in Israel and belong to the Druze ethnic group. I am not related to Arabs in any way; when I visit an Arab country, I feel uncomfortable." The Druze participants also believe that the Jews do not perceive them as Arabs "because we serve in the army." As this ethnic group is not torn between two identities and the Jews do not perceive them as an "enemy," there is less tension for its members. Thus one might raise a question regarding the need for them to participate in such a program. Progress in Israeli identity justifies their participation, but their special situation suggests the need to modify the program for Druze.

Summary and Conclusions

Overall, the progress following participation in the program was moderate, a result that could be expected under current political and social conditions. It is very clear that perceptions engendered by this long-standing conflict will not be resolved on the basis of individual-level processes alone (Bar-Tal, 2004; Salomon, 2004). Social-level prejudice and discrimination must also be addressed through social structural changes that modify existing systems of inequality and oppression. However, without individual-level change, the motivation to make structural changes may not be generated (White-Stephan et al., 2004). This link makes peace education vitally important to a lasting peace.

Several limitations of the study are worth mentioning. First, the intervention was short: ten sessions of 45 minutes each, with relatively large groups is not very promising. Second, outcomes were not followed up to study the lasting effects of the intervention. Third, novice counselors conducted the intervention. The greatest limitation, however, is the fact that the program was applied only with Arab adolescents and not with Jewish adolescents. It may be inappropriate to require
change in the weaker partner in the conflict; as one participant resentfully said: "Why do we get to learn about the Jewish narrative; let them learn about ours, too." Ideally, this should have been the study design and the practice, but such design was impossible to carry out. Future studies should involve both parties in the conflict, although in separate interventions. Future research should also look at individual differences that play a role in the change process. In other words, it would be interesting to identify personality or background variables that affect the change process.

Despite these limitations and in light of the lack of research and the discouraging outcomes that have been obtained, this study contributes to our understanding of Arab youth in Israel, and it suggests a promising avenue for intervention that needs to be further explored. The current study was based on a quantitative design, but the richness of the content of sessions really suggests further exploration of the Jewish-Arab conflict in a qualitative study design.

References


Table 1

*F Values and Effect Sizes by Ethnicity and Group type (experimental/control) at Pre-test*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnictiy</th>
<th>Group type</th>
<th>Ethnicity x Group type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>F(2,26.9) = 35.7***</td>
<td>F(1,27.1) = 0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(η=.37)</td>
<td>(η=.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>F(2,28.2) = 3.1</td>
<td>F(1,28.3) = 0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(η=.07, p&lt;.06)</td>
<td>(η=.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative Beliefs</td>
<td>F(2,29.3) = 0.6</td>
<td>F(1,29.4) = 0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(η=.01)</td>
<td>(η=.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab Identity</td>
<td>F(2,28.8) = 74.8***</td>
<td>F(1,29.3) = 0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(η=.30)</td>
<td>(η=.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Identity</td>
<td>F(2,27.4) = 6.5**</td>
<td>F(1,27.5) = 0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(η=.11)</td>
<td>(η=.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israeli Identity</td>
<td>F(2,28.3) = 63.4***</td>
<td>F(1,28.5) = 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(η=.40)</td>
<td>(η=.0001)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05  **p < .01  ***p < .001*
Table 2

Differences for the Study Measures by Ethnicity at Pre-test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Muslims vs. Christians</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>t(29.1) = 1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duze vs. Christians</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>t(29.5) = 7.7***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Druze vs. Muslims</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>t(27.8) = 7.5***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Muslims vs. Christians</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>t(30.2) = 0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duze vs. Christians</td>
<td>-1.14</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>t(30.5) = -1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Druze vs. Muslims</td>
<td>-1.31</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>t(30.3) = -2.5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative Beliefs</td>
<td>Muslims vs. Christians</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>t(31.0) = -0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duze vs. Christians</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>t(31.8) = -1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Druze vs. Muslims</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>t(30.9) = -0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab Identity</td>
<td>Muslims vs. Christians</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>t(28.4) = 5.5***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duze vs. Christians</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>t(30.8) = -4.0***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Druze vs. Muslims</td>
<td>-0.71</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>t(28.2) = -10.7***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Identity</td>
<td>Muslims vs. Christians</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>t(29.3) = 1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duze vs. Christians</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>t(29.7) = 3.6**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Druze vs. Muslims</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>t(29.3) = 2.6*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israeli Identity</td>
<td>Muslims vs. Christians</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>t(29.2) = 0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duze vs. Christians</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>t(31.3) = 9.1***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Druze vs. Muslims</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>t(30.1) = 10.7***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05  **p < .01  ***p < .001
Table 3  

*F Values for Gains by Background Variables*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Group size</th>
<th>Child’s age</th>
<th>Child’s gender</th>
<th>Therapist’s age</th>
<th>Therapist’s gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Empathy</strong></td>
<td>F(1,22.4) = 0.1</td>
<td>F(1,25.0) = 2.2</td>
<td>F(1,443.7) = 3.6</td>
<td>F(1,24.6) = 1.1</td>
<td>F(1,25.3) = 0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anxiety</strong></td>
<td>F(1,21.4) = 0.0</td>
<td>F(1,24.5) = 0.5</td>
<td>F(1,441.9) = 1.3</td>
<td>F(1,23.2) = 0.3</td>
<td>F(1,23.4) = 1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Normative Beliefs</strong></td>
<td>F(1,19.4) = 1.8</td>
<td>F(1,25.7) = 3.6</td>
<td>F(1,450.2) = 0.4</td>
<td>F(1,24.4) = 0.1</td>
<td>F(1,24.7) = 2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arab Identity</strong></td>
<td>F(1,17.1) = 0.0</td>
<td>F(1,22.8) = 1.7</td>
<td>F(1,457.0) = 1.7</td>
<td>F(1,21.6) = 0.7</td>
<td>F(1,23.2) = 0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religious Identity</strong></td>
<td>F(1,12.0) = 0.7</td>
<td>F(1,20.0) = 3.1</td>
<td>F(1,455.9) = 1.3</td>
<td>F(1,21.2) = 0.1</td>
<td>F(1,22.8) = 1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Israeli Identity</strong></td>
<td>F(1,16.8) = 0.5</td>
<td>F(1,23.4) = 0.1</td>
<td>F(1,456.7) = 0.2</td>
<td>F(1,22.6) = 3.2</td>
<td>F(1,23.6) = 0.9</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table 4

*Means (SD) for the Study Measures by Ethnicity and Treatment Group*

*(experimental/control)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Experimental (N=221)</th>
<th>Control (N=253)</th>
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<th></th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>4.32 (1.05)</td>
<td>4.78 (1.03)</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>3.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>4.62 (1.05)</td>
<td>4.65 (1.25)</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Druze</td>
<td>5.99 (0.70)</td>
<td>6.00 (0.89)</td>
<td>6.03</td>
<td>6.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>4.05 (1.90)</td>
<td>3.72 (1.39)</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>4.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>4.28 (1.84)</td>
<td>3.83 (1.85)</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Druze</td>
<td>2.66 (1.55)</td>
<td>2.87 (1.99)</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>0.67 (0.24)</td>
<td>0.46 (0.27)</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative</td>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>0.59 (0.25)</td>
<td>0.60 (0.25)</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>Druze</td>
<td>0.52 (0.30)</td>
<td>0.50 (0.29)</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>1.96 (0.43)</td>
<td>1.88 (0.53)</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>1.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab Identity</td>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>2.37 (0.46)</td>
<td>2.27 (0.50)</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>2.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Druze</td>
<td>1.72 (0.43)</td>
<td>1.75 (0.53)</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>1.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>2.15 (0.52)</td>
<td>2.10 (0.51)</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>2.37 (0.51)</td>
<td>2.16 (0.65)</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>2.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Druze</td>
<td>2.69 (0.33)</td>
<td>2.71 (0.32)</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>1.67 (0.61)</td>
<td>1.91 (0.60)</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israeli Identity</td>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>1.59 (0.51)</td>
<td>1.71 (0.55)</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>1.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Druze</td>
<td>2.49 (0.47)</td>
<td>2.78 (0.35)</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>2.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

*F Values and Effect Sizes for Gains by Ethnicity and Treatment Group*

*(experimental / control)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity x Group type</th>
<th>Christians</th>
<th>Gains For:</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>Druze</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>F(2,26.4) = 3.4*</td>
<td>F(1,27.8) = 8.0**</td>
<td>F(1,25.0) = 0.1</td>
<td>F(1,26.1) = 0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>F(2,25.8) = 3.5*</td>
<td>F(1,25.9) = 0.1</td>
<td>F(1,24.8) = 8.2**</td>
<td>F(1,26.5) = 1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative Beliefs</td>
<td>F(2,26.0) = 5.1*</td>
<td>F(1,26.9) = 10.3***</td>
<td>F(1,23.3) = 0.6</td>
<td>F(1,27.1) = 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab Identity</td>
<td>F(2,26.2) = 0.1</td>
<td>F(1,27.3) = 0.4</td>
<td>F(1,23.3) = 0.1</td>
<td>F(1,27.3) = 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Identity</td>
<td>F(2,25.2) = 3.6*</td>
<td>F(1,25.9) = 0.0</td>
<td>F(1,22.8) = 9.3**</td>
<td>F(1,26.3) = 0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israeli Identity</td>
<td>F(2,27.2) = 6.2***</td>
<td>F(1,27.6) = 4.8*</td>
<td>F(1,23.0) = 1.9</td>
<td>F(1,30.2) = 8.2**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05  **p < .01  ***p < .001*