

# Exploring Ourselves Within Intergroup Conflict: The Role of Intragroup Dialogue in Promoting Acceptance of Collective Narratives and Willingness Toward Reconciliation

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The current article presents a new intervention model for intragroup dialogue. Twenty-four Jewish-Israeli undergraduate students underwent a yearlong process to learn about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, encountered Palestinian narratives, and reflected on the impact of the Palestinian other on their own identity as Jewish-Israelis. In this research we propose that such a process ameliorates identity threats posed by an intergroup conflict on collective identities, encouraging participants to adopt a more complex view of themselves, which validates both narratives of self and “other.” Research was conducted using both qualitative and quantitative methods to evaluate the intervention. Results showed that participants developed an increased capacity for acceptance of both Israeli and Palestinian collective narratives, and demonstrated a greater willingness toward reconciliation, manifested in more readiness to acknowledge

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responsibility and apologize for past transgressions. Discussion is dedicated to the added value of this model, specifically in relation to intergroup contact approaches to dialogue.

*Keywords:* intragroup dialogue, collective narratives, collective identity, reconciliation, Israeli–Palestinian conflict

Contemporary history has taught us that the most intense and intractable conflicts are between identity groups that share common living space and are subject to the same political structures (Bar-Tal, 2013). The intractability of such conflicts is partly rooted in the adversaries' construction of collective identities, which leads each side to view the others' existence as a threat to its own existence (Kelman, 1999), resulting in mutual negation and delegitimization of the other side's collective narrative (Bar-Tal & Hammack, 2012).

In order to address these challenges, social scientists developed psychological interventions, with intergroup contact, based on the classic contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), receiving widest application and scholarly attention (Al Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Within the Israeli–Palestinian context, many dialogue initiatives inspired by contact theory attempted to cope with mutual delegitimization of collective narratives among Israelis and Palestinians. Usually this was done by initiating intergroup encounters focusing on the relationship between the sides as the focal point of the intervention (e.g., Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004; Hirsch & Bar-On, 2007). Studies that evaluated the effect of such interventions on Israeli-Jews found that it led to greater acceptance of the Palestinian other by Israelis (e.g., Maoz & Ellis, 2008), but simultaneously threatened the core elements of their own identity (Ron & Maoz, 2013).

In the current study, we present a new intragroup approach to dialogue. According to our approach, intragroup dialogue has potential value in managing threats posed to collective identities, and in shifting how the other is perceived. During a yearlong process, we piloted a model of intervention in which Israeli-Jewish students encountered Palestinian collective narratives while exploring specific threats posed to their own collective identity. Our approach of intragroup dialogue demonstrates how creating a space for reflection can help group members to better handle potential tensions provoked in subsequent cross-group engagement, and to prepare them to future encounter with Palestinian collective narratives.

### Collective Narratives and Their Role in the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict

Collective narratives play a major role in perpetuating conflicts, as groups tend to negate and deny opponent groups' narrative while emphasizing and justifying their own narrative (Bar-Tal, Oren, & Nets-Zehngut, 2014). Within the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, collective narratives are a central element in the intractability of the conflict because of the unique characteristics of the opposing narratives emerging from the events of the war of 1948 (Dajani Daoudi & Barakat, 2013). In these events, the winning of the Independence War for the new Israeli state brought about the Nakba, the disaster/catastrophe of the Palestinian people, many of whom had to leave their houses or were evacuated and became refugees. Within the Jewish-Israeli society, the mainstream narra-

tive emphasizes the right of the Jewish people to the land of Palestine/Israel, ignoring and rejecting the Palestinian narrative (see Bar-Tal et al., 2014).

Although the denial of the other's narrative perpetuates the conflict, the opposite is also true: acknowledgment of the other's narrative is linked to progress toward peace. Sagy, Adwan, and Kaplan (2002) found that Israeli youth who perceived the narratives of the other as legitimate had a positive view of future relations between Israelis and Palestinians, suggesting that acknowledging the opponent's collective narrative could be key to building positive relations between two sides.

Indeed, many reconciliation-aimed intergroup encounters and coexistence programs were developed based on this principle (e.g., Nevo, Salomon, & Brem, 2002), with many of these initiatives based on intergroup contact (e.g., Hammack, 2009). However, not enough research has been dedicated to examining the impact of these encounters on participants' perceptions of their own collective narratives, and to the possible challenges inherent in acknowledging the narratives of the other on groups' own narratives and sense of legitimacy (Sagy, Steinberg, & Fahiraladin, 1999). A recent study that aimed to assess such impact on Israeli-Jews described the intergroup encounter as a destabilizing experience, which provoked conflict with significant aspects of the participants' own identities (Ron & Maoz, 2013).

### The Role of Identity in Accepting the Other's Collective Narrative

The difficulty in acknowledging the narrative of the other is deeply rooted in the construction of collective identities in conflict. Kelman (1999), for example, stressed that within conflicts, the other's very existence is a threat to one's own positive identity. In order to accept the other as legitimate, parties in conflict have to liberate themselves from self-validation dependent on the negation of the other. Shnabel and Nadler (2008) suggest particular identity threats to parties in conflict that result from their role as victims or perpetrators. Specifically, experiencing one's group as victim poses a threat to one's need for power and control, while experiencing one's group as perpetrator poses a threat to group members' need for belonging, for they fear being viewed by the world as morally deficient and being excluded from the larger moral community. Following this logic, acknowledgment of the Palestinian narrative by Jewish-Israelis would imply that Jewish-Israelis committed injustice, which would endanger their self-perception as a moral and just people. As previous research indicates, the threat to the sense of morality could lead perpetrators to morally disengage themselves from dubious acts committed by their group (Bandura, 1999) and/or to lack of empathy for the suffering they caused (Halpern & Weinstein, 2004). However, research suggests that when identity threats are addressed, the process may lead to an increased acknowledgment of past wrongdoings (e.g., Čehajić-Clancy, Efron, Halperin, Liberman, & Ross, 2011) and to greater

willingness toward reconciliation with the other (Nadler & Livitan, 2006; Shnabel & Nadler, 2008).

Following this approach, in order to create an impactful encounter with the other's narrative, interventions should address the ways identities are constructed in conflicts as well as the threats posed to participants' identities by acknowledging the other's collective narratives. We argue that an intragroup setting can provide a safe space in which group members can freely observe the similarities with—and differences between—themselves and the other. They can also explore the implications of knowledge or feelings about the other on their own identities without negotiating immediately or directly with the other. An intragroup process allows group members to gain greater awareness of the intergroup conflict, reflecting on their own role in it and encouraging a more complex view of the collective self.

### Models of Intragroup Dialogue

According to our approach, an intragroup dialogue is an internal process of dialogue among in-group members (in our case, Israeli-Jews), which addresses their conflicted relationship with the out-group (i.e., Palestinians). Despite the potential value of intragroup processes in promoting changes in the intergroup level, this has been an understudied topic, especially in the context of communal and ethnic conflicts (Rothman, 2014). Indeed, previous attempts to initiate dialogue in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict concentrated mainly on encounters between Jews and Palestinians (either citizens of Israel or those from the West Bank). Although most of these encounters were accompanied by intragroup sessions (e.g., Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004), they were part of the main intergroup process, which was considered the focus of the intervention—a meeting of fairly equal numbers of participants from each group.

Attempts to discuss intergroup conflict in an intragroup setting are mainly found in the field of peace education (e.g., Ford, 2012; Salomon, 2006) and in recent intragroup dialogue initiatives (Rosenak, Isaacs, & Leshem-Zinger, 2014; Rothman, 2014). In Israel, traditional peace education developed mainly in high schools (Salomon, 2006) or academic educational programs (e.g., Ford, 2012; Rothman, 2012). In-group members learned about different aspects of conflicts while reflectively observing the implications of this content on themselves. Research on various peace education programs in regions of intractable conflict yielded positive results in the form of changed stereotypes (e.g., in Israel, see Maoz, 2000; and in Northern Ireland, see Smith, 1999), the ability to assume the adversary's point of view (Lustig, 2003), and in changing attitudes and perceptions (for reviews, see Burns & Aspeslagh, 1996; Seitz, 2004). However, it is not known whether such programs really make change in the core of groups' collective narratives or only affect peripheral attitudes and beliefs (Salomon, 2006).

The few recent initiatives, rare in the field of conflict resolution, have put forward interventions that are based on intragroup dialogue as a reflective process. In such dialogue programs, in-group members explore their multiple identities and possible ways to resolve the conflict on the intergroup level. Rothman (2014) argues that an intragroup dialogue can foster complex thinking about the other by first fostering it within the in-group. In his work with Israeli students, he suggests a process in which participants meet

within their own ethnic or communal group and explore their different perspectives over the political and social future, specifically regarding the relations with Palestinians. Similarly, in their innovative program for highly influential leaders of conflicting camps inside Israeli society, Rosenak et al. (2014) carried on long-term dialogue processes about the cultural and political conflict inside Israel and its implications for Middle East peace.

### The Present Intervention

In the present research, we contribute to the new field of intragroup work, proposing an intervention model of identity-based dialogue that tackles the identity barriers of in-group members as a result of conflict. We create a meaningful encounter with collective narratives while taking into account potential identity threats imposed on participants' collective identity. In order to create a safe space for reflection on identity threats, both course setting and facilitation encouraged reflexivity and complex thinking. We suggest that an intragroup dialogue should be a distinct process and preparatory phase for an intergroup encounter.

### Course Settings

In our intervention, we combined two elements used in previous intragroup dialogue work: learning about the nature of conflicts, and reflective exploration of participant's emotions and thoughts provoked by the topics. We divided the intervention into two stages of work, the first held in 12 weekly meetings at Ben-Gurion University over the course of one academic semester. Each session was an hour and a half long. The learning process included various guest lecturers on topics including intergroup conflicts, collective identities and narratives, social power relations, and reconciliation. These lectures were followed by sessions of profound discussions and reflections and writing reflective journals.

The second stage consisted of encounters with Palestinians during two day-trips (7 to 8 hr long) to Nakba sites with historical relevance in the Palestinian narrative, and to daily difficulties Palestinians face as a result of the ongoing conflict (such as passing through checkpoints daily). The first trip was to the Israeli towns of Ramle and Lod,<sup>1</sup> and the second to East Jerusalem. Following the assumption that self-disclosure fosters complex perceptions of the other (Hirsch & Bar-On, 2007) and reduces prejudice (Turner, Hewstone, & Voci, 2007), the group met in the field with several Palestinians who shared their personal stories followed by an open discussion. We held in-group processing sessions before and after each day-trip. Following the work of Rothman (2014), we assumed that the intragroup sessions that were conducted in the first stage would promote complex thinking about collective identities (their own and the others') and prepare for identity threats arising from intergroup encounters of the second stage.

### Course Facilitation

The course was cofacilitated by the first and sixth authors of this article. In facilitating the meetings, our main task was to encourage

<sup>1</sup> Ramle and Lod are two Palestinian towns that were conquered during the 1948 war and are now Israeli towns. Most of their residents were evacuated or killed during the war.

critical thinking about the participants' role in the conflict. Therefore, each processing session started with an open invitation to share thoughts, feelings, associations, and insights of participants in response to new knowledge or encounters. We encouraged diverse voices within the group as we explored similarities and differences in attitudes and feelings participants had regarding the issues discussed. Finally, we invited participants to explore the interrelatedness between their thoughts and feelings as provoked by different experiences, and their own involvement in power mechanisms in the Israeli society. This was mainly done in relation to their identity as Jewish-Israelis, but also in regard to their other social identities (e.g., gender, ethnicity, religiosity).

## Research Hypothesis

This intervention was expected to ameliorate the identity threats to participants' collective identities and to encourage perceptions of both identities (self and Palestinian other) as legitimate. This was expected to result in viewing both their own and the other's collective narratives as valid. We also expected this process to lead to greater efforts toward reconciliation, an increased empathy for the other, and more willingness to acknowledge and apologize for transgressions of the Israeli side (see: Čehajić-Clancy et al., 2011; Nadler & Liviatan, 2006; Shnabel & Nadler, 2008).

## Method

We conducted our intervention with a group of 24 (17 women;  $M_{\text{age}} = 25.29$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 1.16$ ) Israeli-Jewish undergraduates from the Department of Education at Ben-Gurion University, who participated in a yearlong seminar. All participants were self-selected and voluntarily participated in the course after being briefed on the process. In order to conduct a comprehensive evaluation, we combined both quantitative and qualitative research to evaluate the process and outcomes of the intervention.

## Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

All meetings and tours were recorded and later transcribed. Process evaluation was based on theme analysis of the observation and transcription of the groups' meeting sessions (Stake, 2013).

## Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

Quantitative evaluation of the course was based on a questionnaire administered through an online platform (Qualtrics) during the first 2 weeks of the academic year (Time 1), and again following the two day-trips during spring semester (Time 2).

## Measures

**Perceptions of collective narratives.** The acknowledgment of self and other in the collective narratives was assessed using the Perceptions of Collective Narratives Questionnaire (Sagy et al., 2002). The questionnaire addressed seven issues related to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict: the Holocaust, the 1948 war, the 1948 Palestinian refugees, the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Israeli settlements in the West Bank, the separation wall, and hatred taught in schools. Items were presented in dyads.

Participants were presented first with an item representing the dominant Jewish-Israeli narrative (e.g., “Many Israelis view the Palestinian refugees from 1948 as victims of Arab Nations, who made a mistake by fleeing from their homes to escape during the war”), and then with an item representing the dominant Palestinian narrative (e.g., “Many Palestinians view the Palestinian refugees of 1948 as victims of the Zionist movement”).

Each statement was followed by three items (on a scale ranging from 1 = *very untrue* to 5 = *very true*) assessing the extent to which the participants accept the self/other narrative on two aspects: cognitive (i.e., “the narrative is legitimate” and “I don't have enough knowledge regarding the narrative”) and emotional (i.e., “I feel empathy toward the narrative”). Responses to each item were averaged across the seven issues, yielding 12 scales in total, six for each narrative (i.e., Palestinian and Israeli), with scores for before and after the intervention. The items assessing perceived knowledge were reverse coded, such that the higher the score the more participants perceived they possessed knowledge regarding the narrative. Cronbach's alpha ranged from .48 to .74 for the legitimacy measure, from .54 to .79 for the empathy measure, and from .80 to .89 for the knowledge measure. Although the measurement of collective narratives is a well-validated measure that yielded adequate reliabilities in previous studies within large samples (see, e.g., Sagy, Ayalon, & Diab, 2011; Srour, Sagy, Mana, & Mjally-Knani, 2013), in the current research, the reliabilities of some of the measurements were quite low. This could be because of the fact that we used a shorter version of the questionnaire. Moreover, it could be that the measurement is sensitive to the dynamic and fluctuant social and political reality of this conflict, which could result in high heterogeneity of the construct measured.

**Level of empathy.** Participants' level of empathy for the Palestinian other was assessed using a three-item scale referring to the extent to which (from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*) participants felt empathy toward the Palestinian suffering (e.g., “I feel empathy toward the suffering of Palestinians living under occupation”) (for a similar measure, see Nadler & Liviatan, 2006). For the empathy scale, Cronbach's alpha ranged from .63 to .77.

**Willingness to apologize.** Participants' willingness to apologize over wrongdoings of the Israelis to the Palestinians was assessed by a single item referring to the extent to which participants were willing to apologize (from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*) to the Palestinians for their suffering as a result of living as refugees under the military occupation.

## Results

### Process Evaluation

**Qualitative criteria for process evaluation.** We identified two criteria representing progress in self-identity: (a) movement in the group discourse from a black-and-white view of self and other to a more complex view, which reflects both cognitive and emotional understanding of the self as well as the other; and (b) the extent to which participants were willing to acknowledge the implications of the Palestinian narratives on their identity, and to take responsibility for their own group's contribution to the continuation of the violence. In the following section, we present a description of the changes in the group throughout the different

phases of the process. Representative quotations from the meeting sessions are included.

**First semester: Lecture meetings and processing sessions.**

At the outset, lectures were dedicated to exploring collective identities and intergroup processes during conflicts. The processing meetings that followed allowed participant to ask questions about the Palestinian other and to explore how learning about the other affected their own identities.

Most participants reported that they had not previously encountered Palestinians and did not know much about Palestinian narratives. The military service (compulsory for Jewish-Israelis) was the main context in which participants gained knowledge about the other. Friends and family members who served in the army were considered agents of knowledge. At this stage, participants raised concerns regarding the impact new knowledge would have on them, as one female participant stated, “When we talk about the (narratives of) the other—do we also talk about ours? Or just about those of the Palestinians?”

As the course progressed, participants were introduced to the subject of collective narratives and power relations between groups. Participants began addressing different kinds of collective narratives within Israeli society and how power relations between groups affect the construction of these narratives. For example, in one meeting, the group started to question the “Holocaust narrative” as one that was taken for granted, and observed how society silences other narratives (and therefore other groups) in Israeli society:

Female Participant 1: “In my opinion, our narrative is that we came to this land because we’ve been through a disaster in Europe.”

Female Participant 2: “I agree with you. I did a course in which the narrative of the Holocaust was discussed and there was the question—where is the narrative of the Mizrahi<sup>2</sup> population—and not just in the context of the Holocaust. Maybe here in this room we are dealing with the conflict in opposition to somebody else (the Palestinians) and it is stronger (than the internal conflict) so we are more united in this room.”

Female participant 1: “But why does it contradict the collective narrative?”

Male participant: “Because it is not the narrative of the Holocaust. Culture can dictate what (people) remember more or less and that is how the conflict (between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews) is being pushed aside (by the majority), just like they try to do with the Palestinians.”

In this conversation, the group compared the silenced narratives of the Palestinians with those of the Mizrahi Jews within Israeli society. Understanding how this power dynamic manifests within Jewish-Israeli society (i.e., between Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews) facilitated the understanding of how power also operates in the intergroup context, between Jews and Palestinians. The intragroup discussion held in the context of the intergroup conflict allowed participants to understand the role of power hierarchies in silencing certain narratives while highlighting others.

Mid-semester, following a lecture by a Palestinian research colleague from East Jerusalem, the group began exploring the significance of directly encountering the other. In this discussion, participants used the insight they had gained from their exploration

of the conflicts between specific groups within Israeli society as a frame of reference to negotiate proximity and distance regarding the Palestinian other:

Female participant: “I agree with you that it is very strange that the one who is more like me (Ultra-Orthodox Jews) scares me more . . . the Palestinian is distanced, doesn’t say much about me and doesn’t represent me.”

Male participant: “I feel that especially in the encounter with the Palestinian lecturer it was very nice (for me) that he looks like my uncles. This made his identity something particularly close for me.”

It seemed that the increasingly complex perception of the “us” (within the Israeli group) allowed participants to have a more nuanced understanding of conflict relationship, which overcome the traditional dichotomous construction (i.e., us and them) of collective identities.

At this point in the course, group discussion became more open and intimate, and the examination of similarity between “us” and the Palestinian “other” led to observations about the responsibility of both sides in acts of violence. The role of Israel as an occupying force was discussed first, mainly through the lens of participants who served—and some who still serve—in the army during reserve duty:

Male participant: “It is obvious to me that if I were on their side, I would be a member of the Hamas (noise in class, laughter). I’m sure I would be an extremist. We were also in our (military) organization. I think everybody here, or most of us, went to the army, and it isn’t different from what they are doing.”

Female participant (interrupts): “But they conduct terror attacks!!!”

Male participant (interrupts): “And what do we do?! We arrest them in the middle of the night! You know how many people (detainees) I took (out of their beds) in the nighttime??? I was taking him out of his bed and gave him to the Shabak (secret security service), and the Shabak . . . it could be that this person is ok . . . we do terrible things!”

By his expression of understanding toward the other’s violent acts, the male participant is pointing at the similarity between the groups. Observing parallels with the other, the group opened a door to an open discussion on the Israeli contribution to the violent character of the conflict.

**Second semester: Day trips and processing sessions.**

Following the day trips, participants struggled with emotional challenges provoked by encounters with the Palestinian narrative as it affected their own identity. Participants expressed feelings such as empathy toward the Palestinians, shame and guilt in the face of the wrongdoings done by their group, as well as fear of the consequences of this empathy on their positive perception of themselves. Participants were asking whether they could remain loyal to themselves as Israelis and also empathize with the other.

<sup>2</sup> Mizrahi Jews are those from Arab countries who came to Israel mostly in the 1950s, following the establishment of the state. The Israeli state founders, who were mostly Ashkenazi Jews widely stereotyped Mizrahi Jews as inferior. Though highly integrated into Israeli society, discrimination against Mizrahi Jews is still common (for more details, see Chetrit, 2010).

The following conversation after the first tour demonstrates this point:

Female Participant 1: "When we saw the films about the Palmach,<sup>3</sup> I was thinking about my grandfather because recently we received his medals from the (1948) war and it isn't possible that my grandfather who I adore did such horrible things. All through the course I'm struggling with it and I don't want to know."

Female Participant 2: "I felt anger and sadness (during the tours); I felt like on 'Yom Hazikaron.'<sup>4</sup> The anger was for both sides, and sadness for them."

Female Participant 3: "I felt that my emotions were changing throughout the tour. At the beginning I felt compassion (towards the Palestinians) and at the summary discussion at the end of the tour, I felt empathy towards my people . . . I agreed with him (the Palestinian guide) to some extent that without the Nakba the Israeli state could not be established—but on the other hand it really made me fear and be defensive . . . I didn't have a place for his feelings as well."

In this discussion, participants explored different ways in which they can construct their identity in light of new understandings raised by the tour. The group discussion allowed participants to express their ambivalence, moving back and forth between empathy toward the self and toward the other.

By the end of the course, participants struggled with questions of their personal responsibility, resulting from their new understandings of the conflict. Participants scrutinized their role in the conflict and considered their possible responsibility for the Palestinians' pain. Group discussions were highly fragmented and contained diverse voices on questions of responsibility, which also captured willingness for change in the conflict:

Male participant: "You see a certain reality and you have to deal with what you saw . . . and then I said, 'Hey, I'm not the only one who's responsible for this.'"

Female participant: "I think it's problematic to say that I'm one of the sides and not to take responsibility. Ok, I acknowledge that—but what is the next step? . . . I think that the fact that we have a refugee camp here in Israel—we should take responsibility for that. It is not valuable if we understand and acknowledge and don't do anything about it."

In this conversation, participants expressed various points of view regarding questions of responsibility, exploring to what degree individual responsibility and agency is a matter of significance. The discussion was highly fragmented and contained different opinions regarding this open question.

## Summary

The qualitative data indicate that the group's encounter with the other was filtered through a process of self-reflection. The group's growing acknowledgment of its internal complexities led participants to perceive the other as complex also, to observe similarities to and differences from the other, and to experience mixed feelings when faced with the other's collective narratives. Toward the end of the course, the conversations became more diverse and fragmented, hence enabling them to encompass multiple voices. Conversations went beyond debates about positions and explored the emotions of participants, which indicated a deeper process of dialogue (Steinberg & Bar-On, 2002). In this sense, the qualitative

evaluation found that the intragroup process led participants to develop a deeper understanding of self and other. Moreover, the process led participants to explicitly acknowledge their role as Israelis in acts of violence, and to discuss questions of their responsibility for the violent character of the conflict, indicating constructive handling of identity threats.

## Outcome Evaluation

**Descriptive statistics.** First, we examined the means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations for all dependent variables (see Table 1). The means indicated that our sample of self-selected students indeed expressed relatively high levels of empathy toward the Palestinians' suffering and willingness to apologize for transgressions committed by Israel. Furthermore, we found extremely high correlations between the items examining the levels of participants' knowledge with regards to the Palestinian and the Israeli narratives, in both times of measurement. Therefore, we combined these scales to one scale reflecting the general knowledge participants have regarding the narratives, measured before and after the intervention. Finally, examination of the normality of the measures using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov (K-S) goodness-of-fit test showed that all scales were normally distributed (all K-S  $z$ s < 1.15, *ns*).

In order to examine our hypotheses, we entered each pair of the dependent variables (i.e., pre- and postintervention) into a paired-sampled *t* test. When we analyzed the data using Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons, the pattern of results remained identical, except for the analysis of the level of legitimacy toward the Palestinian narrative, which became marginally significant.

**Perceptions of collective narratives.** First, the intervention led to an increase in the general knowledge participants held regarding the Israeli and Palestinian narratives,  $t(23) = 3.09$ ,  $p = .005$ , Cohen's  $d = .54$ . More importantly, and as we hypothesized, following the intervention the participants showed more empathy,  $t(23) = 3.33$ ,  $p = .003$ , Cohen's  $d = .81$ , and gave more legitimacy,  $t(23) = 2.73$ ,  $p = .012$ , Cohen's  $d = .55$ , to the Palestinian narratives. Furthermore, the intervention led to similar patterns when we examined the participants' responses to the Israeli narratives. Specifically, the intervention led participants to show more empathy,  $t(23) = 2.97$ ,  $p = .007$ , Cohen's  $d = .51$ , and give more legitimacy,  $t(23) = 2.93$ ,  $p = .007$ , Cohen's  $d = .41$ , to the Israeli narratives.

**Level of empathy.** Although we found that in Time 1, participants expressed relatively high levels of empathy toward the Palestinians, the intervention still increased their willingness to show empathy toward the Palestinians and their suffering,  $t(23) = 4.38$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = .68$ .

**Willingness to apologize.** Finally, we found, as expected, that following the intervention the participants were more willing to apologize to the Palestinians for their suffering,  $t(23) = 4.76$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.19$ .

<sup>3</sup> Palmach was the elite fighting force of the underground army of the Jewish community during the period of the British Mandate for Palestine. During the 1948 war, the Palmach was the leading force in the battles between the Jews and the Arab forces.

<sup>4</sup> Day of Remembrance for the Fallen Soldiers of Israel.

Table 1  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations for All Dependent Variables

Measures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
<i>M</i>	3.50	3.77	2.97	3.40	3.15	3.40	2.78	3.05	3.62	3.98	4.76	5.53	3.92	5.67
<i>SD</i>	.78	.55	.45	.59	.57	.65	.54	.49	.71	.61	1.21	.86	1.67	1.20
1. Legitimacy of Palestinian narrative (T1)	—													
2. Legitimacy of Palestinian narrative (T2)	.51*	—												
3. Empathy toward Palestinian narrative (T1)	.14	-.06	—											
4. Empathy toward Palestinian narrative (T2)	.29	.56**	.29	—										
5. Legitimacy of Israeli narrative (T1)	.41*	.40	.11	.22	—									
6. Legitimacy of Israeli narrative (T2)	.36	.66**	-.02	.35	.77**	—								
7. Empathy toward Israeli narrative (T1)	-.12	.11	.38	.24	.67**	.43*	—							
8. Empathy toward Israeli narrative (T2)	-.06	.29	.23	.24	.61**	.72**	.64**	—						
9. Knowledge regarding narratives (T1)	.25	.26	.14	.22	.20	.04	.08	.05	—					
10. Knowledge regarding narratives (T2)	.02	.43*	-.10	.29	.01	.20	.07	.24	.63**	—				
11. Level of empathy (T1)	.14	.10	.26	.42*	.10	.18	-.03	-.02	.13	-.05	—			
12. Level of empathy (T2)	.06	.14	.28	.44*	-.02	-.05	.16	-.09	.17	.07	.71**	—		
13. Willingness to apologize (T1)	.37	.25	.08	.03	.09	.09	-.03	-.04	.36	.10	-.05	.06	—	
14. Willingness to apologize (T2)	.14	.27	.10	.20	.19	.03	.20	.13	.10	-.02	.10	-.53**	.25	—

Note. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

## Summary

Results indicate that participation in the course affected participants' accounting of their own narrative, as well as their understanding of the other's narrative. Moreover, all comparisons yielded consistent medium to large effect sizes, indicating a robust effect of the intervention on both cognitive and affective measured variables. In terms of our research goals, the increase in acceptance of both narratives indicates the development of complex perceptions rather than acceptance of the narrative of one group at the expense of the other. In addition, there was an increase in levels of empathy toward the Palestinians, as well as in the participants' willingness to apologize, thus indicating participants' growing capacity toward reconciliation.

## Discussion

This article summarizes the construction and testing of a new intervention of intragroup dialogue as a way to allow Jewish-Israelis to productively engage with Palestinian narratives, and to promote identity change by allowing them to encounter their own role living among an asymmetrical, intractable, and violent conflict. Both process and outcome evaluations indicate that the intragroup dialogue intervention led to a more complex view of the identities of the self and of the other. This growing complexity inspired not only increased empathy toward the Palestinian narratives but also a greater capacity to contain different voices of participants within the group. These outcomes are apparent in the quantitative data analysis as well: An increased acceptance of both narratives was demonstrated by the end of the course. The findings strongly support our hypothesis that an intragroup dialogue allows a more complex perception of self and other in a way that challenges the construction of identities in conflict (Kelman, 1999).

In addition, our results indicate that the intragroup dialogue provided a safe space for dealing with the impact of the conflict on participants' collective identity, in a way that promotes willingness toward reconciliation. The qualitative inquiry revealed the growing sense of responsibility participants felt regarding their role in the

violent character of the conflict, and the data pointed to participants' increased willingness to apologize to and empathize with the Palestinians. Participants' growing capacity to face threats to their collective identity indicates that this process encouraged them to be more emotionally and morally engaged regarding their role in the conflict. In this sense, the transformation can also be described as a shift from being a passive bystander to ongoing violence toward being an active bystander, asking what they can do in face of violence (Staub, 2003).

Past attempts to address the challenge of accepting the other in intergroup conflict were mainly focused on direct encounters between Israelis and Palestinians in intergroup settings, inspired by contact theory (Allport, 1954). When conducted under optimal conditions (e.g., equal status between the groups, and institutional support of equality) there is no doubt intergroup contact has noteworthy value: reducing prejudice and improving relations and trust between parties in conflict (Al Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Nonetheless, in the context of prolonged intergroup conflicts, an intergroup setting has potential limitations in adequately answering the challenges posed by the threat to collective identities (see, e.g., Tropp, 2015). Specifically, it focuses on the relationship between the two sides and therefore on the *reaction* of each side to the other. The intragroup dialogue model we present here suggests a process in which participants can *reflect* on their relationship with the other in a safe space among their own group, thereby allowing participants to address identity threats that are posed to their collective identity by the other. In doing so, participants can develop greater awareness of the conflict as well as an understanding of their role within it, which could prepare them for a later intergroup encounter.

Our research has some limitations. First, the current research was designed as an evaluation of a case study and not as experimental research. Therefore, we did not have a classic control group parallel to the study group. Nonetheless, our evaluation used two different methodological approaches in which the process as well as the outcomes were systematically evaluated. Future research

should include a comparison between the suggested model of intragroup dialogue and the traditional models of intergroup dialogue, observing the particular benefits of each process.

Second, our intervention focused on a self-selected group of Jewish students whose levels of empathy toward Palestinians were quite high from the beginning. Despite this limitation, our qualitative inquiry revealed great diversity in the social and political attitudes of participants during group discussions, and our findings indicated that regardless of their background, all participants went through a meaningful process. Yet it is still unclear what affect our intervention would have on more right-wing participants or on more religious participants, and future research should incorporate these populations.

Third, our work concentrated only on one party of an intergroup conflict. It is important to also examine how Palestinian participants, as the disadvantaged group in the current conflict, would react to such intervention. In our view, the goal of intragroup processes is to encourage more responsibility taking and more complex perceptions of self and other among both sides of an intergroup conflict; however, it should take into account the particular identity threats on each side of the conflict (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). Working with advantaged groups, one should focus on participants' awareness of their social power as members of the stronger group in an asymmetrical conflict, and on the threats this poses to their sense of morality. Working with disadvantaged groups (such as the Palestinians), one should focus on the rehabilitation of participants' sense of power, and on how they can be active agents in the conflict situation, not passive victims. We hope to better understand differences in intragroup processes among advantaged and disadvantaged populations in future research, and to examine the proposed model in other conflictual contexts to enhance its external validity.

## Conclusion

Our research reveals the potential impact of intergroup dialogue among Jewish-Israelis in promoting awareness of and responsibility for their role in the conflict. In times of ongoing violence when there is no action toward a political agreement on the national level, an intragroup process has a special importance. In such contexts, intergroup interventions can even become counterproductive, by providing indirect legitimization for the unjust status quo (Saguy & Kteily, 2014). Alternatively, an intragroup process provides a way for privileged groups to understand the power of which they are often unaware (Ford, 2012; Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004), and to allow a space for reflection in which group members can face the negative aspects of their identity by taking responsibility for their role in the violent character of the conflict. We believe that this important yet overlooked field of intragroup dialogue should be further explored and observed, delineating the possible implications of similar interventions on individuals who live within the reality of conflict anywhere in the world.

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