

Identity, Conflict, and Coexistence: Life Stories of Israeli and Palestinian Adolescents

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Assuming a cultural psychology approach, this study examines the life stories of 30 Israeli and Palestinian adolescent participants in a coexistence program. Prior to participation, youth identity was characterized by polarization in which an ingroup ideology is internalized with little understanding of the outgroup's ideological perspective. Three identity-related outcomes emerged following participation. Identity transcendence, in which a reduction in salience of ingroup ideology was accompanied by increased recognition of outgroup ideological legitimacy, characterized the most common immediate outcome. Identity accentuation characterized the long-term impact for most youth, whose ideological identifications ultimately conformed to an ingroup identity narrative. Identity conflict occurred among youth who struggled to integrate the experience of coexistence into the life story. Findings suggest (a) the challenges of identity intervention in the context of intractable conflict, and (b) a context-specific theory of identity in which polarized identities contribute to the reproduction and intractability of the conflict across generations.

Keywords: *identity; adolescence; culture; Israeli-Palestinian conflict; narrative; ideology*

I had a war with myself. To make peace, you have to go to war with yourself. And I made it, and I think I made the right choice.

—Rania, age 15, Palestinian citizen of Israel, talking about the dilemma of how to identify herself to peers at camp

In the period between puberty and adulthood, the resources of tradition fuse with new inner resources to create something potentially new: A new person; and with this new person a new generation, and with that, a new era.

—Erik Erikson (1958, p. 20)

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As Erikson once observed, and a legacy of developmental science focused on adolescence now confirms, “the period between puberty and adulthood” surely represents a pivotal moment in the course of human development. In terms of biological (Susman & Rogol, 2004), cognitive (Harter, 2003; Harter, Bresnick, Bouchey, & Whitesell, 1997), and social (Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990) development, adolescence is a time of significant transition and transformation in the self, as both internally experienced and externally mediated in a particular cultural context.

The struggle for self-understanding assumes particular salience in the context of political conflict, as the absence of peaceful coexistence among groups creates a divisive discourse that frames the life-course experience of individuals. In appropriating a phrase that is part of the lexicon of the peace program in which Rania participates, she describes this struggle within herself. The simple act of self-identification, for Rania, necessitates an internal engagement at the front line of the quest for personal and social coherence that typifies the identity formation process (Cohler, 1982; Linde, 1993). If political conflict creates a polarized ideological context for development—a social ecology with unique challenges for self-construction—what occurs when development is interrupted at a critical life-course moment such as adolescence?

Recognizing that human development always occurs in a particular social, cultural, and historical context (Elder, 1998), this study examines the adolescent identity formation process in the developmental context of political conflict. Identifying the life course as historically and culturally situated (Cohler, 1982; Elder, 1998; Shweder, 1990, 1998), the study of developmental processes in specific historical and cultural moments contributes to the cultural psychology of life-course human development. This research identifies the context of political conflict as a powerful social and ideological determinant of life experience. As such, the presence of political conflict fundamentally affects the trajectory of the life course as youth navigate the polarizing ideological ecologies of their development.

Hypothesizing that the developmental context of political conflict exerts a direct effect on adolescent identity formation, this research addressed two questions: (a) What identity themes are present in the life-story narratives of Israeli and Palestinian youth? (b) How does participation in a coexistence program, in which youth assemble for intergroup dialogue, alter identity and the life story? Consistent with the approach of cultural psychology (e.g., Shweder, 2003), the purpose of this study is to obtain descriptive data on the variability of identity development in a particular context, thereby contributing to the documentation of human psychological diversity.

Identity and Adolescence

Although a topic of interest in early psychological writings (e.g., James, 1890), the problem of identity was most comprehensively undertaken by Erik Erikson (1950, 1958, 1959, 1968). He identified the formation of a personal identity as the critical psychosocial task of adolescence—the necessary milestone if one is to successfully transition to adulthood. Erikson (1959) defined identity as a “conscious sense of [self], . . . an unconscious striving for a continuity of personal character, . . . a maintenance of an inner solidarity with a group’s ideals” (p. 109) and, more broadly, as the inner synthesis of self-concept with social and cultural location. The identity “crisis” occurs in adolescence because it is the life-course moment in which an individual begins to incorporate childhood identifications into an understanding of self that is compatible with the norms of a particular society (Erikson, 1959). As such, identity formation represents “an implicit mutual contract between the individual and society” (p. 127). In this way, adolescent identity development holds a central place in the larger process of social change and cultural transformation over time. Adolescence as a life-course stage within a specific cultural and historical milieu is “committed to some new synthesis of past and future: a synthesis which must include but transcend the past, even as identity does [within an individual]” (p. 153). In reproducing or resisting a particular social order, youth provide an ideological bridge between the collective past and future of a culture, as new ideologies emerge through the identities of a new generation (cf. Keniston, 1971; Mead, 1970).

Erikson’s theory has inspired significant empirical and theoretical elaboration since its inception (for review, see Schwartz, 2001), including paradigms such as identity *status* (Marcia, 1966), identity *process* (Grotevant, 1987), identity *style* (Berzonsky, 1989), identity *capital* (Côté, 1996), and identity *configuration* (Schachter, 2004), among others (e.g., Adams & Marshall, 1996; Baumeister & Muraven, 1996; Waterman, 1984). With the increased recognition of context and variability in processes of human development, the literature on identity has increasingly moved away from the attempt to posit universals of identity development that are rooted in Western cultural values of independence, exploration, and individualism. Theories that offer more fluid and flexible approaches to identity have gained prominence for their vitality in an era of globalization and multiculturalism (e.g., Baumeister & Muraven, 1996; Schachter, 2005).

The study of identity possesses renewed relevance with the advent of cultural globalization—the process by which cultures influence one another through the exchange of ideas and information and, ultimately, become more alike (Arnett, 2002). Globalization fundamentally alters the culture-specific life course and reframes the social and ideological contexts within which identities are formed. As a consequence of globalization, youth confront two sets of normative systems: the global culture (i.e., Western), accessible in media and through technology, and the local culture, accessible outside the front door. Youth in the context of globalization thus develop bicultural identities, given the presence of (at least) two distinct social systems to which they must acculturate (Arnett, 2002). The identities of youth reflect the attempt to reconcile at times conflicting elements within these normative systems. Identity propels the process of cultural transformation as youth engage with the technologies of globalization in a way unavailable to the prior generation (Larson, 2002). Interactions with diverse cultural realities are incorporated into the narrative of life experience as human development unfolds in adolescence and emerging adulthood (see Arnett, 2000).

Exposure to multiple cultural realities characterizes the sociohistorical context of late modernity (Lifton, 1993), with phenomena such as technological advancement, free trade, and immigration at record heights. The effect of cultural change on identity has received considerable attention in the literature on immigration, acculturation, and ethnic identity (e.g., Berry, 1997; Phinney, 1990, 1996). This study contributes to this line of research that seeks to document variability in processes of identity development. Paradigmatically, although informed by the vast psychological literature on identity, this study adopts a narrative approach to identity formation, focusing on the construction of personal identity through the development of a coherent life story.

Identity and the Life Story

A narrative approach specifies the cognitive mechanism through which identities are constructed and given personal meaning (Bruner, 1990). McAdams's (1990, 1993, 1997, 2001) life story theory of identity, in the tradition of a number of other scholars in narrative studies (e.g., Cohler, 1982; Gergen & Gergen, 1983; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Mishler, 1999; Ochs & Capps, 1996, 2001; Polkinghorne, 1988; Somers, 1994), posits that "a person defines him- or herself by constructing an autobiographical story of the self, complete with setting, scene, character, plot, and theme. The story is the person's identity" (McAdams, 1990, p. 151). The life story, McAdams (1996, 2005) argues, represents a level of personality

organization beyond traits and adaptations. The process of telling the life story requires the construction of a coherent integration of life experience that fosters a sense of personal continuity (Cohler, 1982; Linde, 1993). Identities are formed through the process of “selfing,” which involves the ongoing construction and revision of a life-story narrative across the life course (McAdams, 1997).

The cultural and historical specificity of identity is maintained in the life-story approach, because the telling of the story and its contents are always constructed in a particular social context. It is through stories in culture that we learn about the potential characters, events, and plots that make up an acceptable, socially sanctioned, or socially marginalized life story. All cultures privilege certain stories over others, and as we navigate these stories in childhood and adolescence, we come to make decisions about our own story. The story itself, McAdams argues, makes up our identity, dynamically constructed and reconstructed across life, in a persistent dialogue with the storied world of our particular culture.

With the cognitive and brain development that occurs during adolescence (Keating, 2004), a narrative of the life story can begin to be constructed. Contrary to Erikson’s notion that the task of identity development must reach its “completion” at the end of adolescence, McAdams argues that the life story develops across the life course. Similar to Erikson’s notions of ideology, though, McAdams (1990) argues that the fundamental task in adolescence concerning construction of the life story centers on an individual’s decisions about what ideology or ideologies to assimilate into the self-narrative:

In order to define who they are, adolescents seek an abstract system of beliefs and values—an ideology—that will put the self into context. This *ideological setting* for identity grounds the life story within a particular ontological, epistemological, ethical, and religious “time and space.” (p. 162)

In adolescence, the life story is situated within an ideological framework that guides subsequent thought, feeling, and behavior.

Psychological perspectives on identity have been criticized for conceptualizing it as a static, achieved quality inhering—and changing little once established—within the person. It is possible, however, to view identity as a dynamic self-construction by incorporating a relational, practice-oriented perspective into the life-story theory. Gergen (1994) argues for the primacy of social interactions and relationships in defining and redefining self-narrative. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) argue that identity is constructed in and through social practice. A social or relational perspective on identity does not render an Eriksonian or life-story approach to identity problematic. Rather, it contributes to a richer, more salient, and self-satisfying

conception of identity. Recognizing that the life story begins to be constructed in adolescence and is done so through relational practice, the perspective that informs this research is compatible with both classic and contemporary perspectives on identity.

Conflict and Identity

When groups are in conflict in a society, competition exists not solely for resources but also for the legitimacy of identities (Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998). Conflict between groups poses a direct threat to the collective identities in competition. In the case of Israelis and Palestinians, the acceptance of one group's identity and aspiration for national self-determination is often interpreted as necessarily invalidating the identity of the other—given the extent to which each group desires a monopoly on political and territorial control. This “negative interdependence” (Kelman, 1999) that characterizes Palestinian and Israeli identities is transmitted from one generation to the next as the conflict continues. Group identities, however, have their basis in a collectivity of personal identities, suggesting that the transmission of ideological perspectives that prolong the conflict has its origin in processes of individual socialization and development.

Conflict creates a particular social psychological milieu in which group identities tend to become accentuated (Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998). In the developmental context of political conflict, narratives of collective history and identity compete for primacy in a particular physical and psychological landscape. We might expect opposing groups, then, to present similar life stories that are ideologically polarized. Youth may be more likely in the context of conflict to incorporate the polarizing, ideologically extremist discourse to which they have been exposed into their own life-story narratives. The competition between groups constructed by the legacy of generations requires indoctrination of a particular identity narrative that excludes recognition of the ideological legitimacy of the other group. In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, physical segregation contributes to the ideologically polarizing account that dominates the discourse among members of one group. In the midst of this discourse, youth identity develops.

If identification with polarizing ideology might characterize the normative course of life-story development in the context of conflict, what happens when the discourse of ideological polarization is interrupted in the course of identity development? The social psychology of group relations suggests that contact between groups, under certain conditions, can radically transform ingroup prejudice and the negative attitudes toward the outgroup that contribute to group conflict (e.g., Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998). In fact, contact itself can often involve the construction of a new identity—a “superordinate” identity—that

accommodates conflicting narratives (Gaertner, Dovidio, Nier, Ward, & Banker, 1999; Gaertner, Rust, Dovidio, & Bachman, 1996).

In light of contact theory, participation in a structured program in which youth from different national or ethnic groups implicated in the conflict assemble and engage in dialogue might create the superordinate task (Sherif, 1958) of constructing a common identity. Participation in a coexistence program may facilitate the transcendence of a polarized ingroup identity toward the adoption of a new narrative that fosters identity transcendence, characterized by the internalization of an awareness and understanding of the ideological legitimacy of the outgroup. In the context of political conflict, this life event potentially represents an identity intervention in which youth acculturate to a new normative ideological system and perhaps adopt a new discourse (i.e., the discourse of the program). This kind of intervention may offer the promise of conflict resolution on a larger scale, as master narratives are transformed by an expanding web of transcendent identities. The possibility of such interventions to effect large-scale social change, however, relies on two assumptions: (a) that identity change can be maintained over time and (b) that youth in fact possess sufficient cultural power in the context of conflict to effect such change as a collective. Both of these assumptions will be discussed through the analysis of narrative data presented.

Research on coexistence programs with Israelis and Palestinians has commonly adopted a social identity perspective on intergroup contact (e.g., Halabi, 2000/2004). Social identity theory posits that our group affiliations are extensions of our sense of self and that they can serve to affect social behavior independent of our personal identity and experience with members of the outgroup (Brewer, 1991; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). By the very nature of belonging to a particular social category, we possess a social identity that engenders a sense of group loyalty in our behavior. In addition, social identities enhance our sense of self-esteem by providing a strong recognition of group belonging (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). But intergroup conflict can be exacerbated when social identities are accentuated. That is, when between-group differences in social identities are emphasized in a society or between nations, the identities themselves become highly accentuated among individuals. This accentuation, in turn, contributes to the intractability of conflict (Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998). Identity accentuation and ideological commitment, however, may exert a beneficial effect on individuals by creating a sense of meaning and purpose (Barber, 1999b; Barber, Schluterman, Denny, & McCouch, 2005; Punamaki, 1996), as well as enhancing self-esteem (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2000/2004a; Nadler, 2000/2004; Suleiman, 2000/2004a; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

This research examines the life stories of youth who have participated in a coexistence program to assess the narrative outcome of such a life experience. Whether their narratives reveal the incorporation of a new ideological

perspective suggested by common ingroup identity theory, or the accentuation of their social identity suggested by social identity theory, it is likely that participation has a significant effect on life-story construction. Participation in a coexistence program represents a possible turning point in the identity development process for youth from regions of political conflict. Interrupting the life-course moment at which the life story becomes grounded in a specific ideological setting that will determine the future possibilities of self-realization, the context of coexistence demands a radical confrontation with opposing ideological systems. As such, it represents a likely turning point at which identity might continue along a trajectory of polarization or shift toward recognition of the legitimacy of the outgroup's competing narrative of history and identity.

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Historical Overview

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is characterized by the intersection and collision of a multiplicity of religious, cultural, and national identities (Lewis, 1998), which results in at least two dominant ideological discourses (one Jewish, one Arab) on the control of the land and recognition of group sovereignty. Historically, the region known as Palestine until the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 was never autonomously controlled, having a long history of colonial and imperial rule (Khalidi, 1997). Several key historical events prior to the 1948 war help to situate the conflict in its larger global context (see Smith, 2001). These events—although not all undisputed by international scholars—include the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries; the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, which had controlled Palestine for 4 centuries, after World War I; the rise of Zionism in Europe—the ideological conviction that the construction of an ethnic Jewish state was necessary for the protection of the Jewish people; and the immigration of Jews from across the world to British-controlled Palestine in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Holocaust of World War II also likely served as a major impetus for the creation of the state of Israel in 1948.

The events of 1948 offer an example of the polarizing historical discourse in the region. The Israelis refer to the 1948 war as the “War for Independence.” It is, for obvious reasons, a celebratory event. The Palestinians refer to this event as *al-Nakba*, or “the Catastrophe.” In the 1967 Six Day War, Israel occupied the West Bank and East Jerusalem (from Jordan) and the Gaza Strip (from Egypt). The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the primary organizational representative of the Palestinian people following 1948, declared an independent State of Palestine in 1988, with unspecified borders. Though not fully recognized by either the United Nations or the United States, Palestine is recognized by a number of other nations, including China, Russia, India, and most African and Middle Eastern nations. The first Palestinian intifada

(1987-1993) preceded the Oslo accords, in which the Palestinian territories were granted semiautonomy and the Palestinian Authority was created—headed by the exiled head of the PLO, Yasser Arafat. Failure to reach a more comprehensive peace agreement from Oslo through the Camp David summit of 2000 culminated in the second Palestinian intifada, which began in September 2000 (see Said, 2000).

History, however, is far from a collection of objective truths, and groups construct historical narratives that are transmitted both orally and in writing (e.g., Tonkin, 1992). What is of most interest in this study is the way in which youth engage with narratives of collective identity and group history, incorporating these narratives (often containing divergent interpretations and information) into their individual life stories. It is thus useful to briefly chart the ideological foundations of collective identity narratives to which youth may be exposed.

The master narrative of Israeli identity is rooted in experiences with anti-Semitism, oppression, and persecution in Europe, which culminated in the development of Zionism. As part of the global spread of nationalism in which many groups united along cultural, linguistic, and ethnic lines to form “imagined communities” with aspirations to achieve the status of nationhood (Anderson, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990), Zionism sought to revitalize the sense of collective identity and belonging to a “primordial” nation that had eroded in the Jewish diaspora. Its ideological architects focused on the need for Jewish unity and the group protection and recognition that the status of “nation” would provide (e.g., Herzl, 1896/1997; Hess, 1862/1997; Pinsker, 1882/1997). The negative response of the indigenous and neighboring Arab peoples to Zionism and the desire for a Jewish state in Palestine contributed to the formation of an Israeli narrative of global isolation and self-defense. Persecution and victimization, not to mention the imprint of the Holocaust in Jewish collective consciousness, frame the Israeli narrative of historical struggle.

The narrative of collective Palestinian identity is constructed primarily in response to Zionism and the assertion of Israeli identity itself (Khalidi, 1997; Said, 1978/1994a; cf. Kimmerling & Migdal, 2003). With Jewish desire for political autonomy in Palestine, culminating in the United Nations partitions plan of 1947 and the 1948 war that created the state of Israel and eliminated the mandate of Palestine entirely, the Palestinian narrative of dispossession began to emerge. The concept of loss and dispossession—from land and from any kind of self-determination—pervades the Palestinian master narrative of identity (Said, 1994b). But the concept of injustice and the moral reprehensibility of the world’s treatment of their plight also represent significant tropes in the master narrative (e.g., Antonius, 1946; Said, 1979). The experience of living under military occupation since 1967 continues to infuse the narrative of Palestinian identity with powerful emotional tropes, such as humiliation and powerlessness (e.g., Collins, 2004; Pearlman, 2003).

This Study

This study investigates the life stories of Israeli and Palestinian youth participating in a coexistence program. Of primary interest were the ideological identifications of youth and the ways in which participation in the program affected their life-story narratives. Employing a fieldwork approach and informed by an interdisciplinary perspective on adolescent development, I conducted participant observation and administered life-story interviews for two continuous summers in two American-based coexistence programs. In addition, I conducted longitudinal fieldwork in Israel and the Palestinian territories to obtain both ethnographic and longitudinal interview data.

METHOD

Overview

In the tradition of cultural psychology, the overarching method for this study was fieldwork. The research was informed by a grounded theory qualitative approach (Charmaz, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in which the goal is to derive theory from data and to limit the number of a priori assumptions. Fieldwork occurred for two consecutive summers in 2003 and 2004, as well as in Israel and the Palestinian territories for follow-up interviews in 2004 and 2005. Fieldwork included participant observation and the administration of life-story interviews.

Field Sites

The primary field sites were two American-based coexistence programs for Palestinian and Israeli youth: Seeds of Peace International Camp in rural Maine and the Hands of Peace program in suburban Chicago. Although distinctive in origin, scope, and setting, the programs share many notable characteristics. The basic curriculum and philosophy of both programs are modeled on the "human relations" model of coexistence education, in which the primary goal is "to increase awareness of and sensitivity to the personal experiences of outgroup members and to encourage empathy toward them" (Suleiman, 2000/2004a, p. 32).

Seeds of Peace

Seeds of Peace International Camp is located in rural Maine and brings together youth from various regions of political conflict for a 3-week coexistence

program (see Wallach, 2000). The focus of the camp's program is on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, although other groups in conflict are represented in smaller numbers (e.g., Indians and Pakistanis). The programming necessitates the complete immersion of youth in an interactive exchange with youth from the other side of the conflict, as well as with the predominantly American staff.

The Seeds of Peace camp is an isolated, guarded environment with sex-segregated bunks in which Israeli and Palestinian youth live and sleep side by side. The camp is located on a large, serene lake named Lake Pleasant. The physical layout of the camp includes the bunks, coexistence huts, staff cabins, a large dining hall, two field houses for indoor activities, a performance space, tennis courts, basketball courts, several fields for outdoor events, and a physical challenge ropes course in the woods.

The youth arrive in "delegations" (i.e., by country or territory) and are greeted by senior staff who tell the story of Seeds of Peace—its origins in the vision of liberal Jewish journalist John Wallach, with close political connections across group divisions in the Middle East. Following a day of settling into their bunks and general orientation to the camp, youth begin what will become a daily routine for the next 3 weeks. This routine includes community gatherings, meals together at mixed tables, one coexistence dialogue session per day, group challenge exercises, and sports and artistic activities of the individual's choosing. The routine culminates in the 3-day event known as "Color Games," in which youth are divided into mixed-group teams to compete in a series of physical and mental group challenges. The final day is spent celebrating, shedding the green Seeds uniform for clothes of one's own choosing, and sharing final moments together by the campfire.

Hands of Peace

Hands of Peace is an intensive 2-week coexistence program initially organized by the lay leadership of three religious congregations in suburban Chicago (a reform synagogue, a mosque, and a Protestant Christian church). The Hands of Peace program takes place not within the placid confines of an isolated camp but in and around the city of Chicago. Youth reside not together but separately in the homes of congregation members. They come together each day for a coexistence session and lunch, followed by some excursion in and around the city or a group challenge exercise. Some evenings, they assemble again for a social activity. Far from removed from society, these youth are integrated into the multiethnic fabric of American society through the experience of Chicago, with trips to South Asian Devon Avenue, the shopping district of Michigan Avenue, and attendance at religious services of all three congregations.

Participants

In addition to the participant observation conducted at both field sites and in Israel and the Palestinian territories, a sample of 30 youth was recruited for the administration of life-story interviews. Two dialogue groups were randomly selected for interviewee recruitment at Seeds of Peace, and all Israeli and Palestinian participants in Hands of Peace for 2004 ($n = 13$) were recruited as interviewees. Participants were members of one of three identity groups involved in the conflict: *Jewish Israelis* (Jewish citizens of Israel), *Palestinian Israelis* (Arab citizens of Israel who are of Palestinian cultural heritage), and *Palestinians* (Palestinian inhabitants of the occupied territories of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip). Characteristics of the interview sample are summarized in Tables 1 and 2. Youth ranged in age at the first interview from 14 to 17 years. They represented a diverse sample of Israeli and Palestinian youth in many ways, with members of almost all demographic groups represented (e.g., both Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews; both Christian and Muslim Palestinians; youth from both small villages or rural areas and larger urban centers such as Tel Aviv or Ramallah). Interviewees identified diverse motivations to participate in the program, including the desire to “understand how the enemy thinks,” “tell the other side they’re wrong,” “represent my people,” and “work for peace.” Thus, the sample of youth was politically diverse and did not necessarily include youth active in peace movements in the region.

All interviewees were fluent in English, the universal language of both coexistence programs. Although a nonrepresentative sample of youth, they are representative of the youth who participate in coexistence programs, which is fundamental to the research questions of this study. Because of their higher level of education and social status, they are representative of the next generation of likely leaders within their societies (Wallach, 2000). This sample characteristic suggests that these youth are more likely than others in the region to hold positions of social and political influence and thus have greater potential as individuals to affect the course of the conflict. This assumption relies on the agency of elites to affect social structure, which is contested within political science (see Petersen, 2002). Such a sampling approach is nonetheless consistent with the theoretical sampling method of grounded theory research (e.g., Glaser & Strauss, 1967), in which a sample is recruited to specifically address the research questions, regardless of its representativeness of some larger population.

Procedure

Interviewees completed a “life-line” drawing in which they were asked to draw a line that represents the events of their lives, moving in varying directions

TABLE 1: Characteristics of the Interview Sample

<i>Identity Group</i>	<i>Sex</i>	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Jewish Israelis	4	6
Palestinian Israelis	4	5
Palestinians	8	3
Total	16	14

TABLE 2: Demographic Details of Interview Sample

<i>Identity Group</i>	<i>n</i>
Jewish Israeli	
Ashkenazi	7
Sephardic	3
Urban	5
Rural	5
Palestinian Israeli	
Christian	2
Muslim	7
Urban	3
Village or rural	6
Palestinian	
Christian	3
Muslim	8
Urban	10
Village or rural	1

depending on their feelings at the time of events. This task involves creating a visual plot of the life-story narrative and has been used in life-course studies (see Giele & Elder, 1998; Lieblich et al., 1998). Following the life-line drawing, youth were administered a life-story interview in which they provided a narrative description of their life experience. The interview was modeled on McAdams's (1995) original protocol, although it differed in its inclusion of questions specifically about attitudes, values, and beliefs concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Detailed demographic information was also obtained in the interview. The interviews were semistructured and thus the same questions were not asked of all youth. This approach, informed by the grounded theory perspective (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), provides maximum flexibility in the kind of qualitative, hypothesis-generating methodology employed for this study. In most cases, youth were interviewed prior to or at the start of participation, briefly immediately following participation, and then up to 2 years following

participation. Owing to the exploratory nature of the study, the limitations placed on the research by the coexistence programs, and the logistical complexity of conducting cross-cultural research, systematic timing of interview administration was not possible. The subsequent limitations are taken into account in interpretation of results.

Analytic Strategy

The data sources were subject to thematic content analysis, with an attempt to examine narratives both holistically and categorically (Lieblich et al., 1998). Holistic analysis focuses on the complete life story, examining individual facets of identity, whereas categorical analysis focuses on life-story themes across individuals (Lieblich et al., 1998). Analysis proceeded in consideration of the numerous frameworks articulated by scholars in the field of narrative research (e.g., Gergen & Gergen, 1983; Lieblich et al., 1998; Mishler, 1999). Findings are presented to reflect this attempt to integrate analytic approaches within narrative studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview

The results presented here focus on identity-related themes that emerged in the life-story narratives of youth. To provide a window into the prototypical life stories of youth, I begin with the presentation of three life stories that I view as representative of each identity group. A holistic-formal analysis of each story, with some content analysis, is offered. Following this presentation, findings are organized in three sections. First, the concept of identity polarization is introduced and examples from the life-story narratives of youth are presented to demonstrate this key identity-related theme. Second, the notion of participation in a coexistence program as an identity intervention is presented. Finally, I present three identity-related outcomes of participation in the coexistence program: (a) identity transcendence, (b) identity accentuation, and (c) identity conflict.

Introducing the Life Stories

To present the complete portrait of an individual adolescent's identity and the distinctions in life-story themes among identity groups, I begin by offering a prototypical narrative from one youth per group.

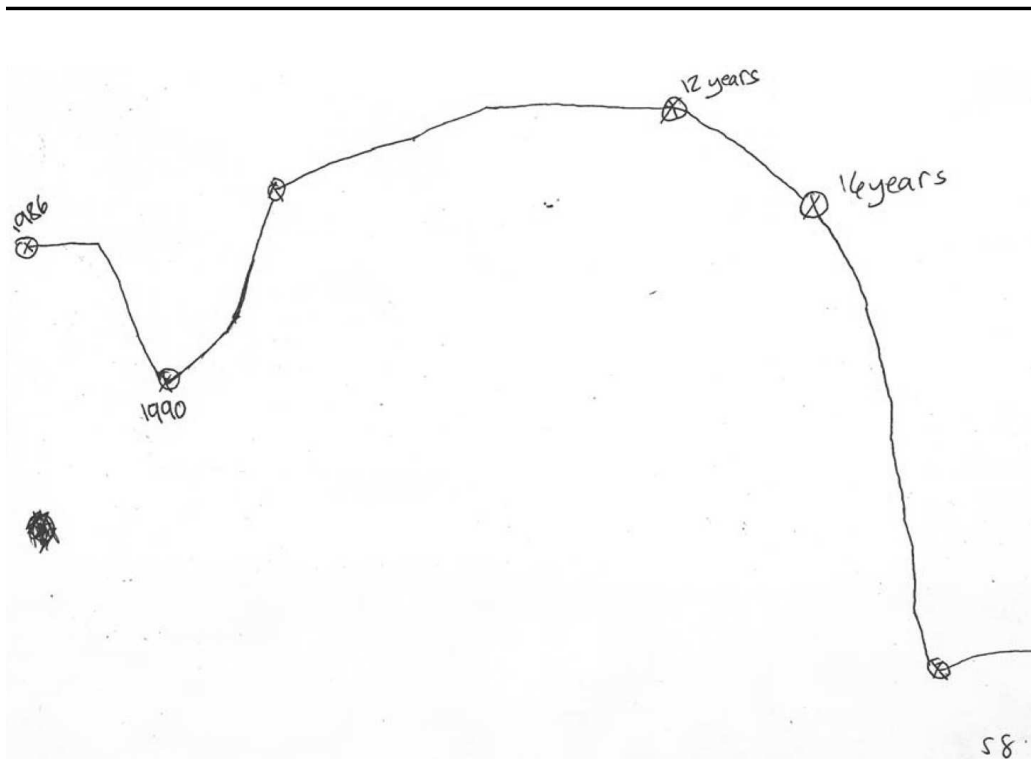


Figure 1. Ali's life line.

“It's Not a Normal Life We Lead”: The Story of Ali

The life story of Ali, a 16-year-old Palestinian Muslim male, is representative of the narratives of most Palestinian males I interviewed. His life-line, presented in Figure 1, reveals a life-story narrative fusing moments of stability with sharp declines (Lieblich et al., 1998).

Ali commences his life story with the retelling of his first memory, which not only represents a *nadir* (i.e., low point) in his life story but also establishes the narrative tone of fear and anxiety that infuses his identity:

My first memory is from when I was four. It was 1990, the Gulf War. We were, like, so scared. I wasn't really aware of everything, but I remember it. The gas masks, and I remember my little brother was like, two or one, and they had to put him in this plastic box or something. And I was really scared. I remember that. You could hear the alarm every day, the sirens. I remember crying sometimes.

The narrative tone with which Ali would begin to understand the storied world around him as a child (McAdams, 1993) is subsequently mired in fear and anxiety.

Ali's life-line does, however, reveal a momentary lapse of tragedy as he professes to have slipped into an extended period of cultural and political "unconsciousness." He attributes this more positive period in his story to simply "not knowing what was goin' on around me. Not knowing the whole situation." Pointing to the portion of his life-line beginning at the third X, he says,

This is when things were going back to normal. I was a kid, so I wasn't aware of the situation, just normal life, school, making friends. It starts going down when I grew up. Until I was 12, I didn't know what was going on really. Then I came to know about the whole thing, the situation, and it's really depressing. I became aware of what was going on around me.

For Ali, engagement with ideology represented a turning point in his life story with a negative effect on his psychological well-being. Following his awareness of "the situation" (i.e., the conflict), his life-line plummets. With the birth and growth of his political consciousness comes the steady tragic decline of his narrative.

At the moment of our first interview, there can be little doubt that Ali was in the midst of a powerful nadir in his life story. Concluding his life story with the experience of his life today, he says,

It's not a normal life we lead—my people, the Palestinians. We have no hope, nothing to live for. We have no freedom, we are discriminated against, killed, humiliated. We have no money. Some of us have no food. What kind of life is this? Is it surprising that so many are not afraid to blow themselves up? It's all we have to fight.

Ali's life story is saturated with the emotional experience and ideological perspective of life under Israeli occupation. His is a story that has become increasingly well-documented, as research on Palestinian youth continues to demonstrate the effect of the conflict on psychological well-being (e.g., Auerbach, Yirmiya, & Kamel, 1996; Barber, 1999a; Elbedour, 1998; Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996; Zakrison, Shahen, Mortaja, & Hamel, 2004). Palestinian youth of the first intifada may have channeled the tragedy of their life experiences into political action (e.g., Barber, 2001; Barber et al., 2005), thereby instilling a narrative of resilience and struggle. Youth of the more violent second intifada, by contrast, may be less likely to appropriate narratives of resilience. Ali's identity, then, assumes a tragic character mitigated only by my knowledge that, given his young age, the story is far from fully scripted.

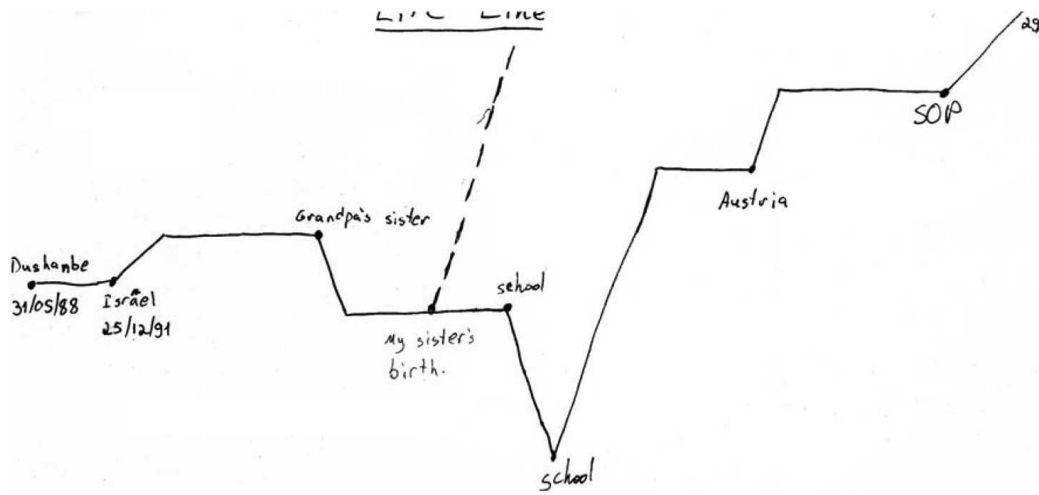


Figure 2. Yossi's life line.

“Jewish in My Blood”: The Story of Yossi

Yossi, a 15-year-old Jewish Israeli boy from a suburb of Haifa, is tall and athletic with military-short hair and dark eyebrows. As his life-line reveals (see Figure 2), Yossi's life story offers a narrative of “descent and gain” (Lieblich et al., 1998), in which nadirs are followed by ever-increasing upward slopes.

The complexity of Yossi's identity is revealed as he begins his life story:

I was born in Dushanbe, it's the capital city of Tajikistan, and my both grandparents—from both sides I mean—they came from Ukraine to there. So, I know I'm kind of Russian but was born in Tajikistan and came here to Israel.

The peak moments of Yossi's life included the birth of his sister (indicated by the dashed line), a trip to Austria, and the present experience of Seeds of Peace, with which he was clearly enamored, being a lover of nature and the outdoors. He came to camp, he says, “to understand the enemy. Maybe when they'll see my point of view, they'll get something, and I'll get something. I just wanna understand them.”

For Yossi, the major nadir in his life story is not related to the conflict, as one might expect. Rather, difficulties in school led to the lowest life-course moment to date for Yossi. Following experiences with, in his words, an “awful teacher” whom he “hated,” Yossi was forced to switch schools.

This low point for Yossi, then, involves something so common to adolescence in postindustrial societies: the transition to a new school in which one must adjust to a new school culture and make new friends (see Eccles, 2004). The cumulative gains for Yossi result from his ability to make new friends, his positive experiences on a formative trip to Austria, and finally his participation in Seeds of Peace.

Emotionally, Yossi's life story is grounded in fear. With striking similarity to Ali, Yossi describes his earliest memory as follows:

We moved to Israel from Tajikistan exactly two weeks before the Gulf War started. And I remember that every evening, we used to go in our rooms and put on the masks and seal the rooms. I remember I didn't like it at all, and sometimes when I put the mask too tight I just had to take it off, and I was puking all of the time. I hated it. I really hated it when I was little.

This childhood experience sets the narrative tone of Yossi's life story in fear and anxiety. This emotional tone of experience is only affirmed in Yossi's current daily feelings of anxiety: "You know, you always live in fear, that the next person who walks into the bus, will just jump in and explode himself. And this is not the kind of fear you want to live in."

Yet, despite a foundational narrative tone of fear, Yossi's life story displays a high degree of resilience to the negative psychological effect of such experience. He says, "We cannot show the terrorists our fear. If we do this, they've won. This is what they want." Perhaps appropriating a response to the fear of terrorism from the cultural discourse in which he is embedded, Yossi defies the fear that underlies his childhood and demonstrates a progressive, positive life-story narrative.

"My Roots Are Palestinian": The Story of Laila

A 16-year-old charming and energetic young woman, Laila is from an Arab village inside of Israel. A descendant of Palestinians who remained inside of Israel following the 1948 war and thus obtained Israeli citizenship, Laila has the unique experience of being positioned between the ideological poles of Israeli and Palestinian cultures. Significant scholarship has revealed that the experiences of Israel's Palestinian citizens (also referred to as Arab Israelis or Israeli Arabs) must be considered apart from Jewish citizens of Israel and Palestinians residing in the occupied territories (e.g., Rouhana, 1997). A key site of this uniqueness involves issues of identity and the ways in which Palestinian citizens of Israel come to understand their position in the conflict (e.g., Schiff, 2003). The construction of a life-story narrative and a coherent identity for Palestinian Israelis may be

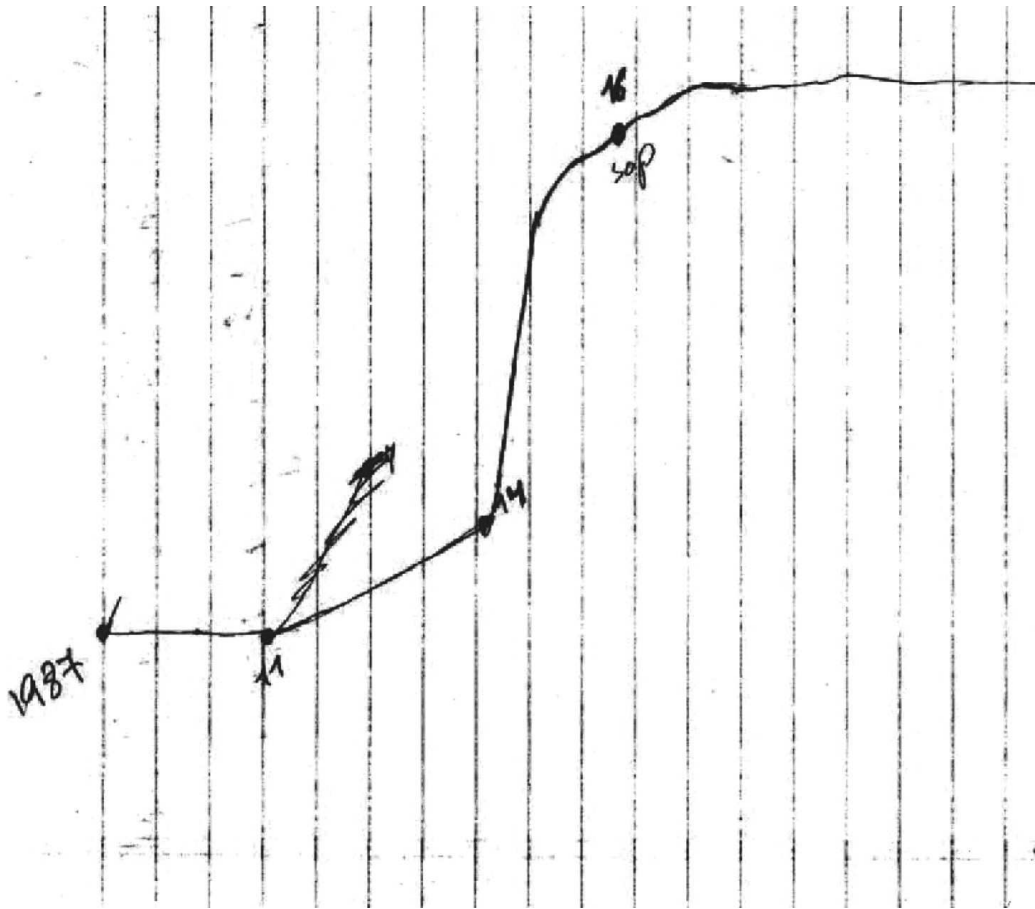


Figure 3. Laila's life line.

a particularly salient feature of their development, given their bicultural status.

Laila's life-line (see Figure 3) reveals a pure narrative of slowly ascending progress, which culminates in her experience in the coexistence program and stabilizes at the apex thereafter. She identifies Seeds of Peace as the peak moment in her life story—a moment of unprecedented change in her thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, as well as her friendships. It represents, for her, the commencement of a new self.

Her narrative is best contrasted with Ali's, which is nearly a narrative of pure descending regress (see Figure 1). Whereas Ali's narrative begins its descent with the emergence of his political consciousness in preadolescence, for Laila, this point in the life story marks the commencement of her ascent. She says,

I didn't have any interest in political things till I was 11. From 11 to 14, I became very interested, in the intifada and in the history of Palestine. And Israel. But more Palestine. When the intifada started, I just got more and more interested. I talked to people of my parents' generation about the previous intifada. All of this led me to apply to Seeds of Peace. I became so interested in the history and the conflict.

Laila is drawn to history and political consciousness in early adolescence, and her participation in Seeds of Peace is directly connected with her personal growth at this time in her life story. Laila's narrative thus presents a story of cumulative growth, in which participation in the coexistence program facilitated further identity exploration and discovery. Her life story follows a deliberate trajectory of meaningful activity: from her development of political consciousness to her active attempts at expanding that awareness (i.e., through participation in Seeds of Peace). For these two adolescents—one Palestinian (Ali) and one Palestinian Israeli (Laila)—the meaning of participation in Seeds of Peace assumes a similar key, yet mirror, significance in their life stories. Both of their stories will be further explored in the discussion of the effect of participation on identity.

Summary

These three brief presentations of the life stories of Israeli and Palestinian youth offer a window into the identity formation process of adolescents in the context of conflict. As brief examples of holistic narrative analysis (Lieblich et al., 1998), they are not intended to provide a complete picture of identity. Rather, they are meant to illustrate particular narratives in isolation, without aggregating individual life stories through content analysis. In the remaining sections, a fusion of holistic and categorical approaches is attempted, with the examination of identity themes across individuals.

Identity Polarization

Is the process of ideological identification, so fundamental to identity formation, unique in the context of conflict? The socialization context of individuals always exposes them to a spectrum of political and social ideology. In different cultures and historical eras, the content at the poles of these spectra will necessarily vary according to the needs and idiosyncrasies of an existing social order. Do societies in conflict tolerate less ideological diversity? Is there a higher likelihood in the context of conflict for identification with extremist, polarized ideology? In the context of conflict, group-induced attitude polarization (Moscovici & Zavalloni, 1969; for review, see Isenberg, 1986), a

phenomenon well-documented by social psychologists, might proliferate at the larger cultural level, creating diametrically opposed societal beliefs (Bar-Tal, 2000). The polarization of political attitudes, particularly toward the outgroup (one's "enemy"), is perhaps an essential feature of identity self-defense in the context of existential threat. Polarization helps to maintain distance from the outgroup and to cultivate psychological distance in the minds of ingroup members. Members of the outgroup are viewed in universalistic terms and represented in threatening stereotypes.

The life stories of youth prior to or just beginning participation in the coexistence program display themes of identity polarization. Their life stories reflect identification with a particular ingroup-specific polarizing ideology that demonstrates little or no understanding of the legitimacy of the outgroup's ideological perspective. The narrative of Yossi demonstrates,

Of course, I think that I'm right. That my country's right. Everybody thinks that his country's right. I mean, what do Palestinian kids mean when they say, "I am from Palestine"?! I mean, there is no such country named Palestine! You can check the UN. There is no country written in the UN notebook called Palestine. There is such country called Israel. So he can say, "I'm a Palestinian from Israel." But when you say, "Hi, I'm from Palestine." "Jerusalem, Palestine" or something, it hurts the people that are from Israel and are from Jerusalem.

For Palestinians, Palestine remains a physical place in world geography. As much of the Arab world has struggled with whether to accept the existence of the state of Israel, and hence to recognize the legitimacy of an Israeli identity, so too does Israeli discourse at times seek to invalidate Palestinian identity, arguing that the Palestinians do not genuinely make up an ethnic group, did not have a distinct culture prior to Zionism, and certainly never had a state of their own. All of this suggests that, perhaps, Palestinians do not make up a nation in the same way that the intellectual fathers of Zionism argued the Jews of the world did. As a symbol of identity rejection, many Israelis refuse to acknowledge an area that might be called "Palestine," perhaps for fear that it might not be relegated to today's Palestinian territories.

Both in the region and across the global community, polarizing discourse abounds on the topic of the massive separation barrier being constructed by Israel. The barrier, intended to span 217 miles, will represent a de-facto border separating most Israelis from Palestinians of the West Bank (as well as many Palestinians from each other and Israeli settlers from Jews inside Israel). To some, it is a "security fence" to ward off would-be Palestinian suicide bombers; to others, it is an "apartheid wall" meant to cage in innocent and vulnerable Palestinians. It is not surprising that the former represents the

Israeli story of the barrier, firmly espoused in the narrative of 14-year-old Shlomo:

They call it a “wall.” It’s not a wall! It’s a fence. It’s for our security and protection—from them. They can’t expect there to be no consequences from all the suicide bombings. It’s a security fence only to protect the Israelis from terrorism. It’s not even a wall as they call it. It’s the same thing they do, calling the terrorists “freedom fighters”! What is that?! They’re always twisting words around.

Shlomo has appropriated the Israeli master narrative of the barrier into his own life-story interpretation of contemporary political events, and he fails to concede the legitimacy of an alternative perspective.

Equally polarizing are the narratives of Palestinian youth, their life stories replete with the theme of loss and dispossession that pervades the Palestinian master narrative of collective identity (Antonius, 1946; Said, 1979, 1994b). Tariq, a 14-year-old Palestinian Muslim, says,

Palestine is our land. The Israelis, the Jews, won. Palestine used to be divided among a lot of people, but then the Jews decided they wanted it all. The Israelis, they came and took it from us! They said that the Nazis killed three million of them, but why then they don’t go to other lands?! They can live in Germany, America, anything! They can live anywhere! They *can’t* live on our land! It’s not their land. In 1948, they destroyed 500 villages. Are those houses theirs?! I don’t think so! That’s all I want to say. They took our land.

Tariq’s narrative demonstrates the powerful identification with an ideology that lacks a pragmatic, realistic perspective on the status of Israel and Palestine, as well as any understanding of the Israeli ideological perspective. Nonetheless, Tariq echoes the popular discourse of Palestinian society during the second intifada, in which the ideology of both groups became increasingly polarized, “negatively interdependent” (Kelman, 1999), and seemingly irreconcilable.

Many young Palestinian males must navigate the discourse of extremism, radical Islam, and martyrdom that pushes the Palestinian master narrative to a place of moral ambiguity in the eyes of many Westerners. Nearly all of my Palestinian interviewees endorsed the practice of suicide bombing as a legitimate form of resistance against the Israeli occupation, identifying bombers as “freedom fighters,” consistent with the discourse of other national liberation movements (see Battin, 2004; Pape, 2005). But nearly all of the youth also offered a particular narrative of the freedom fighter as the ultimate victim of the occupation, hence rationalizing his (or her) action. This excerpt from the narrative of Abdullah, a 16-year-old Palestinian Muslim, is representative of nearly every Palestinian youth interviewed for the study:

My opinion is that I think suicide bombers, I can't call them terrorists. The way they kill, I think it's not a good way to bomb yourself. But if you go ask a suicide bomber before he goes, I think he's really depressed. His family was killed probably, and he got humiliated all the time or something. Their families are dead, most of them. His house was demolished or something like this. So what do you think? What do you think!? There's nothing for you left. *Nothing* left. I think he prefers to die, to finish his life, because he can't go on. He lost his family, he lost his job, he lost everything. And his house was destroyed. He has no place to live. He's living in a tent. That's not a life. So he is so depressed. I think every suicide bomber is so depressed.

For Palestinians, suicide bombing is connected to the resistance of national liberation. In describing his encounter with Israelis, Abdullah illustrates this ideology:

When I first met Israelis and told them I'm from Palestine, they were like, "Tell me, where is Palestine? What do you mean you're from Palestine!?" I explained to them, Palestine is the land, our country, the *whole* country. You're occupying my whole country. We have to fight this occupation, because it's wrong.

When viewed as a means to a legitimate political struggle, forms of resistance such as suicide bombing become acceptable to Palestinian youth, regardless of whether they would in fact participate in such activity.

It is not surprising that as Palestinian youth become fully aware of the conflict and the consequences of occupation on their life possibilities, as my interviewees identified as happening around age 12, the tone of their life-story narrative becomes tragic. Their stories become saturated with polarizing ideological speech. They internalize this ideology, the dominant discourse of their culture, to create a new inner voice, one in which the possibilities of a positive life trajectory, or at least one attuned toward peaceful coexistence with Israelis, become blurry abstractions. It is in this identification with a larger cultural aim—the quest of a collective that views its identity as threatened and oppressed—that Palestinian youth come to find meaning in their struggles. Abdullah, in describing what it means to be a Palestinian, demonstrates,

I'm Palestinian, I have my country, and I love my country. I can't not say I'm Palestinian. It's my country. It belongs to me. I can't give it to anybody. Then, I'm a victim. A victim for what's happening right now. You know, we're suffering a lot. I'm a victim, for what the Israelis are doing, killing our families every day, demolishing houses, destroying families' houses right over their head.

As they come to understand the conflict that surrounds them, Palestinian youth identify with this ideology of struggle and victimhood, providing a sense of solidarity and meaning.

Summary

The ideological content of life stories examined in this study suggests a firm commitment to the master narrative of identity promulgated by the discourse of their respective cultures. The context of conflict, I argue, creates a distinctive setting for the formation of personal identities. Whereas there is perhaps significant variability in the ideological settings of life stories of youth from cultures at peace, the context of conflict demands higher ideological conformity to the master narrative of identity, creating a greater frequency of what I have termed *identity polarization*. Polarized identities are, I speculate, reproduced in adolescence as individuals engage thoroughly with ideology. By allowing for the continued construction of disparate selves, identity polarization as a feature of human development serves to reproduce the identity conditions by which conflicts endure across generations.

The life stories of Israeli and Palestinian youth reveal the reproduction of negatively interdependent narratives of collective struggle and existential threat that influence the activity of both groups (see Pettigrew, 2003). In positing the reproduction of such narratives during the process of adolescent ideological identification, I offer as a hypothesis generated from this qualitative study the psychological phenomenon of identity polarization. Although I recognize the ideological diversity that indeed exists within both Israeli and Palestinian societies, I suggest that the tolerance for ideological diversity is significantly compromised during states of heightened conflict such as the second Palestinian intifada, which provided the developmental context for the participants in this study. In such a context, master narratives of collective identity must embody the ideals that maintain ideological solidarity in the wake of existential threat. Shifts in Israeli public opinion at moments of heightened conflict suggest processes of identity polarization, albeit often in the short-term (see Arian, 1995). Identity polarization as a unique feature of human development in the context of conflict requires significantly more specification and measurement to reveal its culturally salient content and correlates. The findings of this study are meant to stimulate further research in this area, but the clearly identifiable presence of ideological polarization in the life-story narratives of youth, irrespective of their particular political affiliations within their societies, suggests the pervasiveness of such processes during adolescence.

Coexistence as Identity Intervention

Coexistence education is meant to intervene directly in this process of identity polarization among youth, reducing stereotypes and encouraging the development of a realistic representation of the "Other" as something

beyond “terrorist” or “soldier” (see Halabi, 2000/2004; Hertz-Lazarowitz, Zelniker, Stephan, & Stephan, 2004). Such programs strive to create the context for optimal intergroup contact specified by Allport (1954), including an equal-status encounter. In a life-story narrative approach to identity, such encounters offer the possibility for transcendence of ideological polarization through incorporation of the Other into the narrative of self. Shifts in representation of the Other require a revision of self-representation, and intergroup contact offers the possibility of this transformation through intervention in the process of self-narrative construction. Can polarization be reduced, attitudes be shifted, and stereotypes be broken down through intergroup contact? Does this intense experience affect personal identity development, as reflected in the life story?

My findings suggest that these programs do indeed exert an effect on identity. The human relations model of coexistence education to which these particular programs ascribe, in addition to their mere presence in the United States, creates a distinct cultural system with a particular normative structure and social ideology. Quite divergent from cultures in conflict, the coexistence programs strive to create a culture in which the core ideology is one of egalitarianism and respect for diversity. Power relations among groups are equalized, unlike in the region where Israel possesses a strong military and political advantage over the Palestinians (although, of course, at the same time, Israel is rejected by the majority of neighboring Arab states in the region). The particular cultures of these programs are supported and embodied in symbolic practice, with rituals such as “flag raising.” During the first days of the program, youth gather outside the front gates of camp, sing their national anthems as separate national groups, then sing the official Seeds of Peace song and proceed through the gates of camp as one, new group, leaving their national identities to the outside world.

The psychological demands of participation in the coexistence program thus include acculturation to a new normative structure and identification with a new ideology—an ideology that rejects segregation and polarization in favor of the basic tenets of liberal pluralism well-known in the United States (see Galston, 2002). In these types of programs, the superordinate task (Sherif, 1958) of constructing a common ingroup identity (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) is readily apparent to many youth. Identity “de-accentuation” (or “de-polarization”), coupled with identification with the ideology of the program, thus represents the psychosocial “pull” of participation. Identification with this new ideology represents a new, more complex ideological setting for the life stories of youth.

Although the programs are designed to foster identity change more in line with the common ingroup identity model, social identity theory suggests that intergroup contact can serve to actually accentuate identity, fostering individual

self-esteem through stronger ingroup identifications (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Identity polarization may indeed increase as a consequence of contact, consistent with the social psychological literature on group-induced attitude polarization (see Isenberg, 1986). Thus, alternatively, youth might come to accentuate their ingroup identities rather than attempt to construct a common ingroup identity. The results of this study in fact support both patterns of identity outcome. Regardless of the particular outcome, participation appears to represent a turning point in the life story and can thus be conceptualized as a moment of identity intervention.

Identity-Related Outcomes of Coexistence

Identity Transcendence

Common ingroup identity theory predicts that the identification with a new superordinate identity, which serves as an identity “supplement” and does not therefore pose an overwhelming threat to social identity, can occur as a consequence of intergroup contact. The coexistence programs examined in this study in fact strive to instill within participants such an identity supplement in their missions of “humanizing” the Other. In theory, transforming the ideological commitments that youth forge as they construct their identities offers the possibility of thwarting the intergenerational reproduction of the conflict. Large-scale shifts in collective identity may be necessary prior to any serious curtailment of the conflict, as the conflict relies on the reproduction of negatively interdependent collective narratives (Kelman, 1999).

An immediate identity-related outcome of participation appears to be a revision of the ideological setting of one’s life story to include the ideological legitimacy of the other group. I refer to this outcome as identity transcendence because it appears to involve the transcendence of an ingroup-specific polarized ideology toward integration of the ideological legitimacy of the outgroup. As Kelman (1999) argues,

A long-term resolution of the [Israeli-Palestinian] conflict requires development of a transcendent identity for the two peoples that does not threaten the particularistic identity of each. The nature of the conflict, however, impedes the development of a transcendent identity by creating a state of negative interdependence between the two identities such that asserting one group’s identity requires negating the identity of the other. (p. 581)

Such is the extent of polarization of collective identity narratives that frame the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: The assertion of one identity, given its basis in a polarized historical master narrative, seems to invalidate the other.

If these narratives appear negatively interdependent and irreconcilably polarized, how do youth find a way to transcend their own ideologically infused narratives? It is clear that the social and relational nature of self-narrative (Gergen, 1994) assumes a powerful role. Through the intensive relationship building and hyper-sociality of these American-based coexistence programs, with their egalitarian ideologies, youth come to reconceptualize the Other in reference to which their own identity has been constructed.

Building relationships with members of the outgroup—one's "enemy"—results in an integration of the Other into one's own life story. The life story of Laila, 1 year following her participation, illustrates this:

Before I came to the camp, I had a lot of racist ideas. I just *hated* the Jewish, you know. This *hatred*, I just couldn't change it. After the camp, I have been changed a lot. Before camp, I *really* agreed with the suicide bombings, like my family and like most of the Arabs. But afterwards, I totally disagreed. And after I had a lot of friends—Jewish friends, I would see the news and I kept thinking, how would that be if a Jewish friend of mine would die in a suicide bombing? How would I respond? After being with Israelis, I realized, when you understand someone, you can like him. So when I respected them and when I played with them in Color Games and had this coexistence with them, ate with them, and slept next to each other, it changed me. So I've been changed a lot, and I have to say that after being with them and learning more about Israelis.

The encounter with Israelis has, for Laila, actually reversed the ideological setting of her original life story. The extent to which she has internalized an extreme version of the Palestinian identity narrative is reduced, the encounter having infused her own identity narrative with a healthy dose of realism about the Other.

Liat, a 15-year-old, blonde-haired, blue-eyed Israeli girl, professed a similar life-story shift as a consequence of her participation in a coexistence program:

It didn't happen right away at camp, but pretty soon I ended up making friends with Arabs and Palestinians, and it ended up totally changing my life. After camp, my views about everything had changed so radically. I suddenly became the defender of Arabs in front of my family and friends. I just became so much more aware of what's really going on—the injustices. And making friends—I mean, *real friends*—from the other side, it totally changed me. Now when something happens in the West Bank, I worry. I think, what if my friend is hurt?

Similar to the experience of Laila, for Liat, contact with Palestinians enabled her to adjust the ideological setting of her life story, through the cultivation

of friendship with the “enemy.” Not only through the internalization of a particular transcendent ideological perspective but also through the simple act of forging cross-group relationships, Liat’s life story takes a different turn. Her identity, as realized specifically in her social practice (e.g., her responses to friends’ discriminatory jokes, her activity level at the Seeds of Peace Center in Jerusalem), is relationally informed. The narrative possibilities of her life story are altered as a result of her participation.

The relational mechanism of this identity transformation that occurs for many youth who participate is consistent with both theoretical perspectives on identity (Gergen, 1994; Holland et al., 1998) and recent research findings with individuals in the conflict (Schiff, 2003). In these formulations, the self is recognized as socially constructed in and through the relationships in which we engage. By creating the context within which these cross-group relationships can be safely forged, the coexistence program offers the possibility for the formation of a new, ideologically transcendent identity. In this way, identity is understood not solely as an internal psychological static trait but more fully as a socially situated and constructed, ever-evolving seat of meaning identified at the narrative moment in which the life story is told (see Mishler, 1999). Identity itself thus offers the means by which the internal and external worlds of individuals are mediated. Each social interaction at camp is a narrative moment—a point at which one’s life story is told. With this dynamic, social engagement in narrative comes the possibility of a turning point in identity.

Coexistence programs, as sites of identity intervention for Palestinian and Israeli youth, represent potentially facilitating factors for positive youth development in the context of conflict. Socialized in contexts of polarizing discourse and disparate narratives of history and collective identity, Israeli and Palestinian youth may benefit from exposure to a new discourse (cf. Larson, 2000), providing a new language with which they may confront the harsh reality of conflict and rewrite their emerging individual life stories. Participation may provide a critical turning point in the development of an adolescent’s life story and, hence, in his or her identity development process.

The stories of Laila and Liat are representative of many youth immediately following participation and often up to 1 year later. Variability in this outcome, however, appears to be rooted in two primary factors among youth: gender and baseline political identification. With regard to gender, females were more likely than males to display a high degree of identity transcendence, which may be connected to the role of gender roles in the conflict and in Israeli and Palestinian societies more generally (e.g., Johnson & Kuttub, 2001; Peteet, 1994; Sasson-Levy, 2003), as well as to the connection between masculinity and nationalism (Nagel, 1998). As a consequence, adolescent

males may be unwilling to risk allegiance to the national identity narrative, which a high degree of identity transcendence requires.

In terms of baseline political identification, youth who entered the programs in the highest states of identity polarization were less likely to display significant identity transcendence following participation compared with youth whose initial political perspective was more moderate. For example, Israeli youth who identified as “right-wing” in their initial life-story interviews tended to view the attempt to create a common ingroup identity as unrealistic and manipulative on the part of program organizers.

Roai is a 17-year-old Jewish Israeli who grew up in a large Israeli settlement in the West Bank. He describes himself as right-wing. His post-program interview is representative of youth who resist the assumption of a common ingroup identity:

First of all, I felt like the program was somehow not equal, that somehow the Palestinians were more powerful and that we heard so much of only their suffering and not *our* suffering as Israelis. What surprised me most about the program, talking with Palestinians, is the facts. I mean, I know facts, and they know facts, but it's not the same facts. They're changing the facts! I know the facts! I believe Israelis don't change the facts. They want the world to see the Israelis as bad people, but I know that what they say is not true. Like in Lebanon, they say Sharon ordered the Sabra and Shatilla massacres, and it's not true! . . . I didn't change my mind about anything listening to the Palestinians, but it was interesting.

Roai is unwilling to acknowledge the potential legitimacy of the Palestinian historical narrative of the conflict, instead suggesting that only the Israeli narrative represents actual “facts.” In addition, he sees the psychosocial pull of the program toward a common identity as a threat to his Israeli identity when he posits that the program is somehow “unequal.”

Resistance to identity transcendence is also apparent among Palestinian youth whose baseline political identifications are highly polarized. Despite the variability in immediate outcome, many youth do assume a new, common identity following participation, revealing a degree of identity transcendence. Through the internalization of a new cultural system, the cultivation of cross-group relationships, and subsequent behavioral practice, the life story can be profoundly altered for these youth. Over the course of the year following participation, however, all youth must navigate reassimilation into their home cultures. The content of this process determines the extent to which a new, superordinate, common identity is maintained over time. The life stories of youth collected up to 2 years following participation reveal two other identity-related outcomes: identity accentuation and identity conflict.

Identity Accentuation

If the psychological demands of participation in the types of coexistence programs examined here include the de-polarization of identity toward a transcendent identity narrative such as that of Liat and Laila, what happens when youth depart from the ideal world of the program to the harsh reality of conflict at home? It is clear that some youth are able to maintain and perhaps further cultivate a life-story narrative that fosters identity transcendence, but this outcome is by no means uniform.

Social identity theory predicts that the salience of ingroup identity will increase as a consequence of contact for groups in conflict. Whether this outcome occurs because of enhancement of self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), basic cognitive processes of categorization (Turner, 1987), or the need for “optimal distinctiveness” (Brewer, 1991), many life-story narratives collected up to 2 years following participation suggest a process of identity accentuation as a consequence of participation. For Jewish Israelis and Palestinians from the occupied territories, contact offers the opportunity for greater understanding of the Other but ultimately enhances their own feelings of ingroup solidarity.

Mohammed is a 17-year-old Palestinian Muslim who participated in both Seeds of Peace and Hands of Peace. He comes from a middle-class cosmopolitan family, the members of whom generally shun politics and focus instead on education and career advancement. They can best be described as “anti-ideological” and favor a cosmopolitan, global identity, with exposure to a proliferation of discourses, while retaining a sense of local identity as Palestinians. Mohammed wanted to participate in coexistence programs to “represent my people, the Palestinians, and tell our story.” Speaking of his participation 2 years after his first experience of contact with Israeli youth at Seeds of Peace, he says,

I didn't, like, change, or accept the Israelis. I felt more like, I realized that I'm the real owner of this land. I understand why they say what they say, but I was even more Palestinian—I *felt* more Palestinian—when I came back because I realized they don't really care. When I came back, it made me wanna read more about the conflict and about my people. But it also made me realize nothing's gonna change. All I can do is stay focused on my life, and just be proud to be a Palestinian cause you know you're the legitimate owner of this land. I always say, “A day will come and everything will be like the way it should be from the beginning”—we'll have our land back, our country back—and if not, the end of the world will come soon, and people will be judged for what they did. That's it. I'm just living here, trying not to think about the conflict.

Mohammed's encounter with Israelis forced him to identify more strongly with his Palestinian identity and its ideological focus on liberating the land and expressing a national identity. For Mohammed, this shift toward an even greater polarization of identity is connected less to his need for self-esteem, although it assuredly provides a strong sense of belonging. Rather, it is connected to his perception of a lack of agency to actually affect the course of the conflict. He says, "What can I do? I'm just a kid. All I can do is to focus on myself, on my education and my life. This conflict is out of our hands; it's controlled by people way beyond me."

Contact also serves to accentuate identification with the ingroup among Jewish Israelis. Navit, who grew up on a kibbutz and identified as left-wing prior to the program, identifies the program as in fact making her move to the right politically:

I remember during the program feeling like I needed to try and represent Israel, because Israel was under attack. 'Cause there were Israelis who immediately like went with the Palestinians, and they just gave up on Israel, saying, "We're bad. It's not good what we're doing." Suddenly, I felt the need to protect Israel, and we were totally outnumbered. Everyone sided with the Palestinians. I was pushed to the right, but I still kept the values I was brought up with. I felt like I had to represent Israel, and I wasn't used to this. I understand better the conflict now. I started to really *feel* Israeli, to feel connected to Israel in a way I hadn't before.

Navit perceives the encounter with Palestinians as threatening to her Israeli identity, and in reaction, she finds herself coming to accentuate her ingroup identity as a Jewish Israeli.

The accentuation of social identity as a consequence of contact is consistent with some theoretical and empirical work with Arab-Jewish coexistence programs in Israel (e.g., Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004b; Helman, 2002; Suleiman, 2000/2004a, 2004b), although the long-term effect of most programs has not been systematically studied. Although identity accentuation contributes to the intractability of the conflict (Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998) and may therefore appear to be a negative outcome of coexistence programs, there are also benefits to identity accentuation. Ideological commitment, for example, can moderate the effect of exposure to political violence and conflict among youth (Punamaki, 1996).

The development of a secure, positive ingroup ethnic identity is associated with enhanced self-esteem for youth (e.g., Phinney, 1991, 1996; Phinney & Chavira, 1992), suggesting that the outcome of identity accentuation might possess benefits for participants in the course of their own ethnic identity

development and for their psychological well-being. For Palestinian Israelis, participation in coexistence programs appears to increase their awareness of an ethnic identity previously de-accentuated in favor of an Israeli civic identity. In fact, the most common outcome among Palestinian Israelis was a particular form of identity accentuation and discovery in which, as a consequence of coexistence, they gain a greater sense of their Palestinian cultural identity and accentuate it over their Israeli civic identity.

There is little question that the Palestinians who remained in Israel following the 1948 war have been marginalized in Israeli society as members of a stigmatized minority group (Ghanem & Rouhana, 2001; Grossman, 2003; Rabinowitz, 2002; Rouhana, 1997; Sa'di, 2002; Suleiman, 2002a)—a group not at home with the “ethnocratic” character of the Jewish state (Ghanem, 2002). As members of a minority group, Palestinian Israelis experience a qualitatively unique process of identity development, compared with their Jewish Israeli and Palestinian counterparts. In particular, they must manage their multiple affiliations (Schiff, 2003) and reconcile their disparate civic and national identities (Suleiman, 2002a, 2002b; Suleiman & Beit-Hallahmi, 1997). Although their perceived marginalization in Israel, as well as their Palestinian cultural heritage, may typically align them ideologically with Palestinians in the occupied territories, this research suggests that the identity formation process of Palestinian Israeli adolescents is more complex.

The narratives of Rania and Jibril—both 15-year-old Muslims from different Arab villages inside Israel—provide a sharp identity contrast and reveal the complexity of identity formation for this group of youth. Both were interviewed in the first 2 days of participation at Seeds of Peace. Discussing her identity, Rania says,

I have a great connection with the Israelis. I live with them; I have an Israeli passport. I also have a great connection with the Palestinians, because, you know, we are originally from Israel—the Palestinians. So in this camp I say that I'm Palestinian, but usually I say I'm Israeli. Before I came, I didn't know what I was gonna do. I had a war with myself. To make peace, you have to go to war with yourself. And I made it, and I think I made the right choice. Even if I say I'm from Israel, I can't lie to my heart, to say I'm not Palestinian. So I made that choice here, to say I'm Palestinian. I'm not Israeli.

At this particular moment in her life story, as she is in the process of engaging with other Israelis and Palestinians, Rania is in a state of identity discovery. As she acknowledges, prior to participation, she would typically identify herself as “Israeli.” But participation in Seeds of Peace has provided her with the context to explore her identity and come to a greater understanding of herself. As

part of this process, she has come to accentuate her Palestinian identity, perhaps de-accentuated owing to its stigmatized status in Israeli society. As any minority group strives to obtain equal rights in a society, its members often attempt to assimilate into the majority. Whereas such attempts at quiet assimilation may have characterized a particular generation of Palestinian Israelis (Rabinowitz, 2005), the continued conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, both inside and outside of Israel proper, has perhaps allowed a new generation of Palestinian Israeli youth to accentuate their Palestinian identity.

Despite the cultural shift toward greater public embrace of their Palestinian cultural roots, there remain divisions among Palestinian Israelis on the ways in which to accentuate their identities. The narrative of Jibril provides an interesting example of this tension:

My identity is Arab Israeli. I am Israeli first; I have no question about this. I live in Israel. Israel is my country. I'm proud of being Israeli and I'm proud of my country. When an Arab Israeli says, "I'm Palestinian," it's because somebody has told them: "You are a Palestinian living in Israel. You must remember your brothers who have been killed" or something like this. And this happened with me, in the first day here. Somebody came and asked me, "Who are you?" I said, "I'm Jibril, I'm from Israel. I'm Arab." He said, "How can you say you're from Israel? You're a Palestinian!" I said, "No. I'm Israeli!" He said, "You forgot your brothers, you forgot what the Jews did to us." These kinds of things, this doesn't help make peace. This makes it harder!

At this moment in his life story, Jibril prefers to accentuate his Israeli identity, in contrast to Rania. This contrast demonstrates the unique challenges of Palestinian Israeli youth in coexistence programs. Their identities are inherently complex, as they strive to reconcile disparate civic and cultural identities (Suleiman & Beit-Hallahmi, 1997). What is clear, though, is that participation in the coexistence program commences a process of identity exploration, during which youth must come to a decision about which of their identities to accentuate. In this way, participation in a coexistence program appears to result in identity discovery for Palestinian Israeli youth.

The life story of Jibril at age 16, collected in his home village in Israel 1 year after participation, provides a powerful picture of the effect of this process on his identity formation. He says,

I feel now I understand where I am on the map in this conflict. Now I understand that I'm Palestinian, and how important that is. After I came together with everyone involved, Palestinians, Israelis, other Arab Israelis like me, I realize I'm more Palestinian than Israeli. The Palestinians understand me, and I understand them. I side with them 'cause I'm Palestinian, and now I have a better sense of that.

Although his initial inclination was to accentuate his Israeli civic identity at camp, Jibril ultimately came to discover that he shares a stronger affiliation with Palestinians than Israelis and to accentuate his Palestinian national identity over his Israeli civic identity.

In summary, identity accentuation represents a common outcome for youth up to 2 years following participation. For Palestinians and Jewish Israelis, accentuation seems to occur in response to the perception of identity threat or simply the realization of ingroup solidarity that accompanies contact. For some youth, the encounter with the Other thus enhances the salience of ingroup identity, which may be beneficial for individual ethnic identity development but problematic for the maintenance and reproduction of the conflict. For Palestinian Israelis, accentuation manifests itself uniquely in a process of increasing salience of Palestinian cultural identity and decreasing salience of Israeli civic identity. For youth whose identities become accentuated following participation, the life story tends to conform ideologically to the ingroup master narrative of collective identity. These youth are comfortable identifying with this narrative and allowing it to frame their personal narrative of identity. They tend to view their participation, like Mohammed does, as a useful and beneficial experience toward self-discovery and recognition of ingroup solidarity. Other youth struggle to incorporate the experience of participation into the life story, revealing identity conflict.

Identity Conflict

Participation in the coexistence program offers challenges for the initial construction of a coherent life-story narrative in adolescence. Youth whose post-program narratives reveal significant difficulty incorporating participation into the life story experience a degree of identity conflict. The post-program narratives of Ayelet and Ali are representative of such an outcome.

Ayelet is a Jewish Israeli from Tel Aviv who entered Hands of Peace with a desire to learn about the Palestinian experience. She described herself as “liking Arabs” and endorsed sympathy for their plight in her initial life story. During the program, she underwent a major emotional process of identity transcendence, saying to a Palestinian girl who had become her closest friend in the program,

I can't believe my people are doing to you what was done to us. We didn't learn anything from the Holocaust, and it's wrong. When I go home, I'm gonna make a change for you guys.

Immediately following the program, Ayelet's identity transcendence is readily apparent:

When I go home, I wanna tell everyone about all the Arab friends I made, and what amazing people they are, and how they're just like us. There's no difference really between Jews and Arabs. Everybody should come to this program to realize this. Listening to all of the stories of the Arabs, it made me realize why they do those things [like bombings]. I realize if I go to the army, it'll be just so I can see what it's like, what happens in the army—but not to give a hand for the war against the Palestinians. I will change anything that my leaders in the army will think of, like slapping an Arab just because he's an Arab. What's *that* about? I don't care to stand up to my commanders and talk freely. They might be commanders, but they might be foolish too. If I go to the army, it'll be to change it, to be more human. We are all human beings. . . . Growing up in Israel, I always knew there was a war, and suicide bombings, but I never understood the reason. Now, listening to the Palestinians, I realized my country is totally wrong. It's nothing to be ashamed of, to admit you're wrong. It takes a lot of courage and maturity. Now I see the whole picture, and now I understand myself and I'm proud of myself.

In forming relationships with Palestinians, Ayelet has come to a radical reconstruction of her own identity. She now sees herself as someone who has come to view Israelis and Palestinians as united in a common humanity, and she has even gone so far as to view her ingroup as in some way responsible for the conflict.

Although such a response is not surprising given her initial sympathy for the Palestinians, Ayelet's long-term response to the program reveals the extent to which structural forces limit its effect. One year after the program, her ideological identifications have shifted and she reports "confusion" about the experience:

When I got back, I told my friends what all the Palestinians had said and they said to me there's no way it could all be true. Like what they said about the checkpoints and what goes on there, the injustices, or other stuff that goes on in the West Bank with the army and stuff, it's just not true. I think they were just exaggerating it. As much as I want to understand them, I can't give up my country. I can't give up Jerusalem. As much as I don't live there and I don't really go to the Wall and everything and don't pray and I'm not that religious. But still it's important for me, for my people. Basically, I feel confusion after the program. You want to be a friend with them, but there are so many things that they don't let you be friendly with them because they want too much. So I'm so confused this year, but I just focus on my life here and I don't think about the Palestinians.

Ayelet's resistance to relinquishing any portion of Jerusalem can be contrasted with her pre-program interview: "Jerusalem is half theirs; it belongs to them. So why not just give it to them? That's what they care most about anyway." For Ayelet, the structure of the conflict maintains the segregation

of Jews and Arabs in Tel Aviv, and she does not come into contact with Arabs in her daily life. Rather than “doing something” about the conflict, as she had expressed a desire for immediately following the program, she finds herself confused in the year following participation, unable to integrate the experience into a coherent life story.

Palestinian participants report more identity conflict following participation than any other group. Ali’s life story 1 year following participation demonstrates:

By the end of camp, I was ready to make peace. I was ready to talk to Israelis and make friends with them. And we got so much done at camp. We had even solved Jerusalem! I made Israeli friends. But when I went back home, I just realized that this is wrong. You can’t be talking to them! You can’t be making friends with them. They’re killing you! How can you be friends with them? They’re living in my land! The whole thing is wrong. . . . I think that peace now is like giving up. After what I’ve been through, I changed this year. Last year I believed in peace. I wanted peace so bad ’cause it wasn’t a good life we’re livin’. It’s like, we have no reason to live. But now I grew up a little and have pride. I got to know new people back home—Palestinians—and they talked to me and I really respect them. I think they are the most people I respect in the whole world. They woke me up to what I had done—that it was wrong.

Ali, having experienced peer rejection and internal conflict about his participation, now revealed a significant degree of ideological polarization in his life-story narrative. Proceeding perhaps from a trajectory of immediate transcendence to conflict and ultimately repolarization, Ali represents another outcome of coexistence. As youth depart from the idealistic confines of an egalitarian social system (i.e., the program) and return to an authentic life setting, complete with the polarization that retains the conflict itself over time, the power of social structure over individual experience becomes apparent. In some cases, the turning point cannot be sustained, and a polarized self-narrative returns and, with it, perhaps an even more polarizing ideological setting for the life story.

Faced with the negative reaction of peers whom he clearly respected and admired, Ali was no longer able to make meaning of his experience at Seeds of Peace. His identity was actively repolarized when I interviewed him 1 year after he participated:

I don’t believe in peace. I believe peace is like giving up. And there’s this thing in Islam. If someone dies for his own country, he’s like, these are the best people. If you die for your country, you go straight to heaven. That’s what we believe. It’s in the Koran also. The whole Islamic population is supposed to fight for Palestine because, you know, there is the prophet Mohammed was there. It’s a holy land. The *whole* land is ours. It’s like we’re

supposed to fight for every inch of the country. It's ours, and they took it by force. We're gonna take it back by force. If we can. But we, we can't take it back by force. We don't have money. We're not allowed to have an army, weapons, nothing. This is why we use the freedom fighters.

Ali's life story suggests that participation in the coexistence program is not a universal peak experience in the life course, although many participants do indeed identify it as such. Examination of the ways in which the coexistence experience is incorporated into one's narrative over a more extended period of time is critical to understanding its long-term effect on identity, personality, and cognition.

For Palestinians, the kind of narrative outcome that Ali displays may be more frequent owing to the immediate effect of the conflict in their daily lives (e.g., United Nations Development Program, 2002) and in Palestinian socioeconomics, more generally (Roy, 2004). For both Jewish and Palestinian Israelis, it is possible to be shielded from the conflict itself, to witness its effect only with the occasional news footage or public protests. For Palestinians, however, the conflict infuses most every aspect of their daily experience, as they must pass through checkpoints to travel even between neighborhoods at times. The presence of soldiers in the Palestinian territories is also abundant. Thus, for Palestinians, a return from the utopia of the coexistence program—during which they have been empowered to share their experiences in a unique equal-status encounter—might result in a greater likelihood of identity confusion and repolarization.

CONCLUSION

The life stories of Israeli and Palestinian youth reveal narratives of identity in the process of formation. The plasticity with which these youth identified with particular ideologies reveals the malleability of identity at this critical point in the life course. For youth socialized in the context of political conflict, identity interventions in the form of coexistence programs offer the possibility of a turning point in the identity development process from polarization to identity transcendence. Such identities might promote the construction of cultures of peace in their resistance to the dominant polarizing discourse that serves to reproduce the conflict. In constructing a new narrative of self in relation to the "enemy," youth may become motivated to spread an ideology of peaceful coexistence to which they themselves have acculturated and embraced. Transformations in individual life stories may contribute to the gradual rescripting of master narratives of collective identity, perhaps the key to modifying the existing conditions that

maintain and exacerbate the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians across generations.

Despite the promise of identity transcendence revealed in this study, identity accentuation was a common outcome for youth up to 2 years following participation. Through the encounter with the Other, these youth identify the ways in which their social identity is distinct, and their feelings of ingroup solidarity increase with the perception of threat that can accompany the pressures of identity transcendence inherent in the philosophy of the programs. With enhanced ingroup solidarity naturally comes identification with the polarizing ideology that reproduces the conflict over time. This outcome, although seemingly problematic for such intervention programs, reveals the limits of such efforts and the power of larger social structures in the identity development processes of Israeli and Palestinian youth. The identity accentuation outcome, however, may more closely mirror the reality of the conflict and contribute to a "genuine dialogue between secure identities" (Nadler, 2000/2004, p. 27). Acknowledgment and further exploration of this identity outcome may be useful in reconceptualizing the underlying philosophies and curricula of such programs so that they formulate realistic outcome goals.

This study reveals that the process of identity intervention is not always clearly linear. Following intervention, a host of variables likely affects the ultimate narrative outcome. As noted, initial political identification, which has its roots in families and communities of origin (e.g., Ribak, 1997), in part determines the resilience of identity polarization to change. Following participation for youth who do undergo significant reductions in identity polarization, the role of the peer group appears salient as youth experiment with their new identities upon reintegration to their cultures of origin. Transformations in the social structures and power relations on the ground would also likely contribute to the extent to which Palestinians are able to maintain identity transcendence over time.

Although identity transcendence as a narrative outcome of participation is consistent with the underlying philosophy of these programs and theoretical accounts of conflict reduction (e.g., Kelman, 1999), its absence in some youth ought not to be viewed as entirely negative. Scholars of identity have long noted that identification with a group's ideals is fundamental to identity development (e.g., Erikson, 1959), and connections between commitment to an ethnic identity and individual self-esteem have been documented (e.g., Phinney, 1991). Identification with one's social identity, including its ideological discourse and social practices, may indeed provide meaning for youth in the context of a challenging ecology of development such as that of pervasive and longstanding political conflict (Barber, 1999b,

2001; Barber et al., 2005; Punamaki, 1996). Adherence to a particular national identity may be a natural response to the perception of existential threat and ontological insecurity that occurs in the context of political conflict (cf. Giddens, 1991; Kinnvall, 2004). In addition, reduction of the conflict through dialogue between two secure, fully expressed social identities might represent a more realistic possibility for long-term coexistence than the reduction of affiliation with one's ingroup social identity (e.g., Nadler, 2000/2004). Such secure identities can be developed through experiences of intergroup contact such as those offered by these coexistence programs, which help to highlight awareness of and distinctions between Israeli and Palestinian identities.

Informed by the paradigm of cultural psychology (e.g., Shweder, 1990), the purpose of this research was to document and generate further hypotheses with regard to (a) the particularity of adolescent identity development in the context of political conflict and (b) the effect of participation in a coexistence program on the process of identity development. Results contribute to the development of context-specific constructs such as identity polarization, which might offer a useful heuristic for the assessment of attitudes and ideological identifications among youth socialized in the context of conflict. Results also contribute to the empirical examination of coexistence programs by specifying their potential effect on identity development. Although the findings of this study suggest that coexistence programs do indeed affect youth identity by altering the life story, further investigation is needed to ascertain the long-term effects of participation in adulthood.

This study was limited by its relatively small sample size, although such sample sizes are common in qualitative research. A smaller sample size facilitated the administration and analysis of rich life-story interviews. In addition, the nonsystematic assessment of a selective sample of youth limits the generalizability of findings. The generalizability of findings might be restricted to the highly educated middle- and upper-middle-class youth who participated. Future longitudinal research that incorporates quantitative and qualitative approaches with larger samples will serve to more carefully identify the relationship between participation in a coexistence program and identity in the transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood. Investigation of the psychological processes that occur during this life-course transition for youth in political conflict will reveal further possibilities for intervention to curtail the reproduction of conflict across generations.

Despite these limitations, this study offers a unique contribution to the literature in its investigation of identity development and intergroup contact through the lens of both cultural psychology and the life-story theory of identity. In documenting processes of identity development with sensitivity

and openness to cultural variability, this study contributes to the growing literature on the diversity of human development and the nature of adolescence in the context of globalization (e.g., Brown, Larson, & Saraswathi, 2002). The phenomenon of identity polarization and its resistance to intervention, as revealed in the outcome of identity accentuation, reveals the identity insularity that can characterize human development in the context of identity threat and ontological insecurity (e.g., Kinnvall, 2004). In its use of a life-story approach to identity, this study revealed coherent narratives of self in the making and therefore addressed two general deficiencies in the literature on intergroup contact: (a) the absence of an investigation of *process*, and (b) the dearth of longitudinal investigations (Pettigrew, 1998).

Recognizing the potential power of youth in altering disparate discourses within culture through a transformation in ideological identifications, this research converges with current theoretical articulations on the primacy of adolescent identity in the era of globalization (e.g., Arnett, 2002; Larson, 2002). The cultural tide relies on the ideologies of a new generation. The application of a life-story approach to the study of youth identity development seeks to reveal the ideological leanings of a new generation, one for whom peace may be a distant possibility, yet still one whose experiential trajectories remain unknown. The ever-evolving context of conflict and political instability might yet be influenced by a collective re-scripting of master narratives or an acknowledgment of the distinctiveness and legitimacy of social identities, but only through intervention in the process by which polarized identities are reproduced during adolescence.

Although this study reveals the possibilities of cultural transformations through the ideologies of a new generation, it also reveals the limits of agency in human development. The context of conflict creates unique challenges for adolescent identity development, and the malleability of identity polarization may indeed be limited by a social structure characterized by the perception of existential threat and the need for ingroup solidarity. Transformations in social structure, coupled with interventions to reduce levels of identity polarization, might contribute to the cultivation of identities attuned to peaceful coexistence.

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