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DISMANTLING THE WALLS: PEER-FACILITATED INTER-RACE/ETHNIC DIALOGUE PROCESSES AND EXPERIENCES

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THE PROGRAM ON CONFLICT MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVES

The Program on Conflict Management Alternatives was established in January, 1986 by a grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and additional funds from the University of Michigan. These basic grants were renewed in July, 1988 and again in July, 1991. The Program supports an agenda of research, application, and theory development. PCMA also establishes links among other university research and teaching efforts relevant to conflict management alternatives, and maintains liaison and collaboration with similar efforts in other Universities and Practitioner agencies. The Program staffers own work focuses explicitly on the relationship between social justice and social conflict, specifically: (a) the use of innovative settlement procedures and roles for disputants and third parties; (b) the institutionalization of innovative mechanisms and the adoption of organizational and community structures that permanently alter the way conflicts are managed; and (c) the fundamental differences and inequalities between parties that often create conflict and threaten its stable resolution.

We examine these issues primarily in United States' settings, in conflicts arising within and between families, organizations and communities, and between different racial, gender, and economic constituencies. These specific efforts are supported by a variety of research and action grants/contracts with governmental agencies, foundations, and private and public organizations/agencies.

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DISMANTLING WALLS AND BUILDING BRIDGES: STUDENT EXPERIENCES IN INTER-RACE/INTER-ETHNIC DIALOGUES¹

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My prior experiences with women of color (admittedly very limited) had not been very positive. Many of the black women [I had interacted with] had seemed to be very hostile or suspicious of White women [...] Silence was safer [...] I was afraid the same thing would happen here. I was worried that I wouldn't be able to say what I was feeling or thinking for fear of offending someone or making them defensive.

I grew up in a predominantly Black neighborhood [...] and since I don't have any close friends that are White it is difficult for me to initiate talk about race relations with the people I know only on a hi-bye basis.⁴

Despite increasing demographic diversity on college campuses, students often discover that opportunities for intergroup dialogue are rare. Students who seek substantive opportunities to learn about social groups different from their own soon learn that the campus climate is generally not conducive to openly asking difficult questions or addressing issues of inequity and difference in intergroup relationships. "Cultural diversity" courses and the inclusion of "multicultural" perspectives in the curriculum, though necessary to correct representational imbalances in the traditional curriculum, have done little to respond to students' need to actively and critically engage with each other around issues central to intergroup relations and conflict. In this paper, we describe student experiences and learnings in intergroup dialogues. The paper begins with a definition and goals of intergroup dialogues. Next, we describe the program design used in implementing inter-racial/inter-ethnic dialogues on a college campus. Findings from an earlier evaluation study of students' learning outcomes are then summarized. The main body of the paper uses qualitative data from students' papers to provide "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1983) of the intergroup dialogue process and the issues it addresses. The paper concludes with pedagogical and research implications.

Peer-facilitated Intergroup Dialogues

Definition, Goals and Educational Processes

Peer facilitated intergroup dialogues, developed and implemented by the Program on Intergroup Relations and Conflict (IGRC) at the University of Michigan, are one attempt to address the unmet needs and expectations of students.⁵ The intergroup dialogue effort is based on the premise that only through systemic instruction, interaction and communication among social groups can we constructively address issues of conflict and community and work toward the creation of inclusive diverse communities (Schoem, 1991; Zúñiga and Nagda, 1993). They reflect a growing emphasis at the college level to develop curricula and pedagogies which address social and intergroup conflicts, multicultural perspectives, social justice issues and

social change (Collins & Andersen, 1987; hooks, 1994; Schoem et al, 1993; Sleeter & Grant, 1988; Takaki, 1989; Wehr, 1979). An intergroup dialogue is a structured face-to-face meeting between members from two different social identity groups that have a history of conflict or potential conflict. These groups are broadly defined by ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion, socio-economic class, geographical origin and other characteristics (Zúñiga & Nagda, 1993). Examples of dialogues are Men and Women, White People and People of Color, Blacks and Jews, Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals and Heterosexuals, among others. The groups are peer facilitated by two trained students, one from each of the participating groups.

The goals of the intergroup dialogues broadly cover developing personal awareness and knowledge of intergroup issues, skill-building, and a commitment to challenge group inequities (Zúñiga, Nagda & Sevig, forthcoming). More specifically, these goals entail:

- developing personal awareness of self as a member of a social group in the context of systems of privilege and oppression;
- developing constructive intergroup dialogue communication and conflict processes and skills which are safe and affirming to all participants;
- exploring the similarities and differences in experiences across social group memberships, and linking these to larger societal arrangements;
- exploring the origins of beliefs, attitudes and behaviors at the individual, cultural, and institutional levels, particularly those which block a constructive relationship between members of the social groups in the dialogue;
- challenging ignorance and misinformation through multiple learning processes--open and critical confrontation of ideas and behaviors, readings and input from facilitators;
- identifying ways of building alliances and coalitions inside and outside the group setting to challenge individual and institutional forms of discrimination.

The primary component of the intergroup dialogue approach is the creation of horizontal communication processes that allow participants to listen to one another and ask questions. The communication process is not a "feel good" approach, but an intensive introspection and joint reflection among participants that focuses on personalizing and sharing experiences of race/ethnicity, identifying commonalities and differences, and examining the impact of intergroup conflicts and social justice issues (such as racism and sexism) on the relationship. The communication and consciousness-raising processes are supported by a variety of readings and analyses of specific intergroup conflicts and social justice issues. Conflict is actualized in verbally expressing disagreements, challenging one another, constructively working with conflict and participating in alliance-building activities.

Program Design

During Winter Term 1995, The Program on Intergroup Relations and Conflict (IGRC), in conjunction with the Program on Conflict Management Alternatives (PCMA) and the Program in American Culture, offered seven sections of "Building Bridges through Intergroup Dialogues."⁶ The dialogues were open to all students on campus. The groups met for two hours a week over seven weeks. Students received one academic credit upon completion of all requirements.

Intergroup dialogue sections reported in this paper are from five inter-racial/inter-ethnic dialogues--White people/People of color, White women/Women of color (2 sections), Blacks/Jews and Blacks/Latino(a)s.

Diverse enrollment is a critical issue for the dialogues. Optimal group size is twelve to fourteen students with equal numbers from the two participating groups (see footnote 6). A total of 65 students participated in the dialogues cited above and their demographic make-up was as follows: 29 Women of color (19 African American, 6 Latina, 2 Asian American, and 2 Bi-Racial), 6 Men of color (all African American), 25 White women (6 Jewish) and 5 White men (3 Jewish).

Course requirements included: 1) Attending all class sessions and participating actively in dialogues; 2) Analyzing and incorporating short readings to facilitate dialogue and discussion of pertinent issues; 3) Reflecting upon exercises, readings, and personal experiences and understanding through weekly journal entries; and 4) Writing an 8-10 page self-reflection paper addressing learning experiences during the seven weeks.

Readers/course packs were developed for each specific section and included five distinct sections. These were: 1) testimonials and narratives; 2) working across differences/communication/conflict and alliance building; 3) history/social/cultural material; 4) issues; and 5) bridge-building and coalition actions. Selected readings were taken from various sources--magazines, brochures, newspapers, students' publications, book chapters, and journal articles. Each item was reviewed by instructors, facilitators, and other staff members to determine its appropriateness for the dialogues.

Design of the curriculum paid attention to both process and content. The intergroup dialogues are intentional in their approach; the design, facilitation, activities, and readings are tightly tied to the learning goals. Figure 1 outlines the stages of the intergroup dialogue design for a seven week dialogue (Zúñiga, Nagda & Sevig, 1995). The first three weeks involve setting the stage for dialogue, and practicing listening and dialoguing skills. The content for these weeks is on becoming progressively more aware of one's own and other's social group memberships and learning about the issues between the two participating groups. The next three weeks are devoted to discussion of specific issues in the particular intergroup relationship (as listed in Figure 1). The last session is geared toward alliance-building and a discussion of next steps or actions to positively challenge inequities and barriers present in the intergroup relationship. A particular focus is on understanding how cultural and institutional socialization affects the intergroup relationship. The process and content are described in greater detail elsewhere (Nagda, Zúñiga & Sevig, 1995; Zúñiga, Nagda & Sevig, forthcoming).

Research Program

The present action research effort builds upon an earlier study in which we compared the learning outcomes for students enrolled in different courses that address diversity issues, particularly race, gender, class and sexual orientation (Zúñiga, Nagda, Sevig, Thompson, & Dey, 1995). Pre- and post-test surveys assessed the impact on learning outcomes for students participating in intergroup dialogues in comparison to those in introductory Sociology and Women's Studies courses. The results suggested that the intergroup education process facilitated student learning. In general, this process was marked by open and honest communication, addressing conflicts and exploring ways to take action against social injustices (Zúñiga, et al, 1995). Such an education process contributed to students' learning about their own and others' social identity groups, bridging differences between groups and developing a positive approach to conflict. Moreover, students indicated that the intergroup education

process was important in positively influencing other learning outcomes, such as becoming more socially aware, learning to work through conflicts, appreciating family heritage and culture and thinking about ways to take action to address social injustices. Taken together, these results suggest the value of intergroup dialogue as a curricular and pedagogical approach to diversity issues and multiculturalism in the spirit of participatory education. In this paper, we focus on questions of *how* and *why* peer facilitated dialogues help students learn. The research questions guiding the present study are: How do students experience, describe and explain the intergroup education process in inter-race and inter-ethnic dialogues? How do students “construct” their own learning?

Analytic Method

In this paper, we report a qualitative analysis of 40 inter-racial/ethnic dialogue participants' final self reflection papers.⁷ The guidelines of the final papers encouraged thick description and analysis (including use of readings) of different aspects of the dialogue experience. Students were instructed to describe their thoughts, feelings, reactions and what they had learned around six topic areas: hopes and fears about participating in the dialogue; their own social identity group within the dialogue; the other social identity group in the dialogue; conflict and communication; intergroup relations; and next steps. Papers were analyzed with the consent of the student authors. Although this data source has limitations, it does represent students' best efforts to think reflectively and analytically about the processes which may facilitate intergroup dialoguing and subsequent action-taking. Our ability to provide thick descriptions in some areas was limited by the focus and framing of the questions included in the guidelines. For example, students were not asked to give examples of difficult questions that they were able to ask, or that even after asked were not addressed by the group. Therefore, our ability to describe that aspect of the dialogue process was limited even though a large cross section of students commented on this aspect of the process in general, broad, and sometimes vague terms. Another limitation concerns the fact that these were graded student papers which could have influenced some of the ways students chose to report their experiences. However, it is our impression based on our roles in the course (i.e., instructors and consultants) and reading of these papers for the purpose of feedback and evaluation, that the data reported by the students in these papers are consistent with what we know about student outcomes in dialogues through various sources, including facilitator reports, talking with students, student evaluations, observing intergroup dialogues, etc.

The purpose of this analysis was to develop a richer understanding of the intergroup education processes which facilitated student learning in the intergroup relations dialogues and to provide “thick descriptions” of participants' experiences (Geertz, 1983). Using the intergroup process dimensions⁸ developed for our quantitative outcome study as a conceptual organizer, we explored themes in the data to see if participants experienced the key factors in the program design in the way that we had assumed. We also analyzed similarities and differences in the data, and attempted to identify emergent themes, hypotheses and variables. We developed a code and cluster system to identify patterns, common themes and variations in the data (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Written documents or “memos” (Charmaz, 1983) were used to examine both the pre-determined intergroup education variables and emergent variables for each of the four inter-race /ethnic dialogues. These memos identified common and contrasting meanings/themes for each of the identified clusters and supported and illustrated clustering criteria (Zúñiga, 1992). The structure and content of this paper thus reflects our most recent thinking and writing about these data, but the analysis, especially that which addresses emergent themes, remains an ongoing process.

Analysis

Introduction

Students do not enter the intergroup dialogues as empty vessels. A whole host of prior personal, social and educational experiences not only help to shape students' ideas about intergroup relations but also their ability and willingness to work across differences. In many instances it is students' prior contact or lack thereof with members of groups different from their own that compels them to sign up for an intergroup dialogue. Many of the students in the dialogues reported coming from racially or ethnically homogeneous neighborhoods or communities. For many students, the intergroup dialogue was the first opportunity they ever had to talk about "taboo" topics (e.g. interracial/interfaith relationships, affirmative action, skin color issues in people of color communities, separation/segregation on campus) across racial/ethnic group boundaries. Although excited and curious, students were also anxious about these new opportunities, especially given their prior lack of substantive intergroup contact:

I grew up in an almost all Jewish neighborhood, and had virtually no black friends. I had had contact with African Americans [however] I never really got to know any one Black person particularly well. I never went to a Black person's house for coffee. I never sat down with a Black person just to talk. The idea of speaking to African Americans about emotionally charged subjects like inter-racial (inter faith) marriage, affirmative action and [Black-Jewish relations] was a little bit intimidating. I didn't know enough of their perspective. I was afraid that many of them would take views akin to those of Louis Farrakhan and Leonard Jeffries and that I would have to spend most my time defending Judaism and myself.

~Jewish man, Blacks/Jews dialogue

I am a very proud Black woman and I considered one of my strongest attributes to be the fact that I will not let anyone forget it [...] I wondered if I would be squelched - as Whites think they can do to us in the classroom. I was concerned that we would be underrepresented and, hence, silenced -- as we are in classroom. I was mortally afraid that I would leave every session angry with issues left unresolved -- as I do from my other classes.

~African-American woman, White Women/Women of Color dialogue

As students quickly learned, dialoguing and addressing racial issues constructively is emotionally and intellectually challenging, takes time and is hard work:

I've spent more time reflecting on "what it means to be a part of a white women/women of color dialogue" than I've spent being in class [...] in some way [this process is about] us agreeing to enter the pit of our collective fears, hatreds, and desires willingly. Rather than blindly tearing our hair out [...] we stop to look at each other. And to look again, and again; to listen with our eyes, ears, and hearts until we get it right.

~White woman, White Women/Women of Color dialogue

During the past several weeks my feelings have run the gamut of human emotions. I've been pissed off, made to laugh, made to cry [...] I have had to come to a realization that there are some white people who are interested and concerned about community and alliance building.

~African American woman, White Women/Women of Color dialogue

In addition, this process also requires being able to respond to others' feelings and experiences in ways students had not done before:

Our communication over the past seven weeks was pretty intense at times [...] I think everyone [in this dialogue] was defensive from the very beginning [...] feeling that their way of thinking was the only way to think. [Now] I don't think I can compare my oppression [as an African American woman] to Jewish oppression because the bottom line is [...] they are both wrong. Sometimes it is hard to listen to other people's pain, especially when you feel it is lesser than yours, but I have reached the conclusion that pain is pain.

~ African American woman, Blacks/Jews dialogue

Students' limited exposure to and contact with people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds feeds into an array of hopes and fears about joining a co-learning situation with "different" others. Moreover, there are conflicting expectations and understandings of what the roots and solutions to long-standing intergroup conflicts are. While the remainder of this paper will focus on various aspects of the intergroup dialogue process that contributed to students' learning, it is interesting and informative to first examine these hopes, fears and preconceived notions. In doing so we not only gain a glimpse into some of the important challenges of even beginning an intergroup dialogue, we also gain a better understanding of the emotional and intellectual depths at which students experience the intergroup dialogue process.

Group Beginnings: Hopes and fears about participating in the dialogue

The early stages of the inter-race/ethnic dialogues are a time for setting the tone, outlining process and content goals of the dialogue, and developing group norms. After participants engage in ice breakers and other activities designed to help them get acquainted, facilitators encourage the sharing of hopes, expectations and concerns related to participating in the dialogue. The importance of this stage in the dialogue is not only in orienting dialogue members but in setting the stage for creating an intentional environment that will be conducive to communication and constructive conflict work.

Students entered the dialogues with many hopes. An African American woman came to the dialogues "hoping this class wouldn't only attract Black people like most of the classes I have taken which have to do with race and difference." A Jewish man reported walking in to the dialogue with a "defensive mind set" and "wanted to educate anyone who believed" in misinformation about Jewish people. Another student reported "blurting" out stereotypes about Jews in a class and not being confronted by her professor; upon "reflecting on the incident I cannot even deduce where I could have even acquired such an idea." She came to the dialogues to undo the ignorance. Yet others came in with the specific hope of understanding "why if we had so much in common we were at odds with each other" and bridging "the gap between the Blacks and Latino/as."

With hopes there were also fears. An overriding fear was that of personal safety and representation in the group. White students often talked about the fear of offending someone or being labeled racist. Many students of color were fearful that this would be one more class where they "would be underrepresented and, hence, silenced." They were also afraid that they "would leave every session angry with issues left unresolved." Other students reported being concerned about climate issues that might stifle the dialogue process. Examples of such communication blocks identified by students ranged from polite and cautious participation to subtle or overt acts of hostility, aggression and oppressive behaviors. One student anticipated destructive intergroup communication dynamics:

Initially, I feared that [we] white women would be always dominant and overtly racist; [...] The white women did talk at least half, if not more, of the time. Concretely, I worried that they (we) would be poor listeners, unable to give equal value to women of color's words [...] I also worried that women of color would be more overtly hostile to white women, simply looking for a soapbox to vent their rightful anger from.

~White woman, White Women/Women of Color dialogue

Sharing these hopes and fears in the beginning of the dialogue not only helps in creating an open and safe climate for discussion, but it also becomes the "baseline data" that facilitators and students can then reflect upon, reframe and rename throughout the course of the dialogue.

Beginning to listen to and talk with members of my own and the other group

In a second important stage of the intergroup dialogue, participants are divided into identity groups in order to share and explore socialization issues and critical moments in their identity development as well as to identify advantages and disadvantages of being a member of their group. The "data" that each group generates is then shared with members of the other group and participants begin to name similarities and differences in their individual and group experiences.

Open communication and confrontation within and across social identity groups are critical in facilitating intergroup learning and honest discussions. In some instances, participants and facilitators are able to enact intergroup processes which encourage open communication, disagreement, and confrontation about difficult topics or issues both within and between groups. In other instances, intergroup communication processes are stifled by overly cautious behavior on the part of one or both the groups thus preventing the sharing of ideas and experiences and face-to-face disagreement and conflict. In still other instances, communication is lessened by subtle or overt hostile behavior and implicit forms of intergroup competition.

A number of students discussed the value of open communication in their ability to participate and contribute to the dialogue process:

I have to admit that at first I was very shy and afraid to speak up my thoughts. Over the course of the sessions my self-esteem to speak up increased. Everyone in the dialogue including the students and facilitators helped ease communication. Everyone was very attentive, listening carefully to comments made by other students.

~Latina, Blacks/Latino(a)s dialogue

Other students commented on the centrality of listening to others, and being listened to, in the process of forging open communication across social group boundaries:

It was from these discussions that I was able to express my thoughts on various issues and also learn from the others in the group. By being in an open space like this it made me feel like people (both white and people of color) were actually listening to everything that I had to say. They also provided me with alternative outlooks to each issue we discussed. This is one part of the dialogue that initially shocked me because I was expecting everyone to have one tracked minds that were not really positive. I think I felt like this because when I watch open forums on TV both white people and people of color seem to slander each other over stereo-types that exist instead [of] dealing solely with the facts and issues at hand. I thought that everyone, both white people and

people of color, would be putting the blame on someone instead of trying to create solutions to the problems.

~African American woman, White People/People of Color dialogue

Sharing my views and experiences

Students welcomed the opportunity to participate in a mixed race/ethnic group where they could explore their views and examine their experiences of race (and in some instances gender) and race relations. Most students spoke of the value of honest sharing and open communication in deepening the dialogue process and, more specifically, of the value in sharing thoughts, feelings or experiences even at the risk of sounding "ignorant" or "racist." Other students commented on their feelings of relief when they realized that they could express their views and feelings about race, and ask questions which, in their view, would be considered offensive in other social settings. Still other students talked about the uniqueness of intergroup dialogue processes both in encouraging horizontal communication among participants and in providing a relatively safe environment.

We (the White students) seemed inhibited to say things that make us look racist or ignorant. [A White man], though, was the exception. [After that second session] I began to be totally honest with myself and others. I talked more directly about my experiences. I wasn't scared anymore of sounding in a certain way. I think the reason for that was because [the same White man] had shown me through an example and no one had jumped all over him [...] It was a huge relief and it allowed me to be honest with myself and therefore helped me learn more about myself and others.

~White woman, White People/People of Color dialogue

[Seldom can you find] a safe arena for open intergroup dialogue [about race relations] among common people [...] In other forms, entire groups partake in demonstrating their feelings by staging protests and marches [...] I feel these type of events lack the personalized characteristics of a true dialogue such as the one I have participated in. In the former examples there is no room for mistakes, for such an occurrence could lead to more heated arguments. The former examples also do not provide as much of an effective arena to challenge perception since they can polarize and induce further conflict (it becomes another "us" versus "them" situation) [...] it is not the polarization or conflict that restricts dialogue, it's when we allow these things to cause us to talk at, as opposed to with one another.

~African American man, White People/People of Color dialogue

The opportunity to meet and discuss in separate social identity groups during some of the sessions also contributed to risk taking and honest sharing:

I am not sure whether to attribute our frank conversation [with other white women] to the fact that I wasn't worried about saying something "wrong" as I would have been in front of women of color [...] I think that not wanting to offend the women of color by saying something that would display that I was secretly racist or ignorant was a worry [...] I felt freer to be more critical as I share my views [about our role as white women].

~White woman, White Women/Women of Color dialogue

Students in the Black/Latino(a) dialogue also commented on the value of honest sharing in the context of a "People of Color Dialogue." To many of them, the dialogue provided a rare opportunity to communicate more freely without the pressures or challenges of the predominantly White classroom.

This dialogue has been unique because we, as Blacks and Latinos, could feel free to express our opinions and concern about issues concerning us [...] it made it easier to discuss sensitive issues without always having to educate or give historical explanations about our thinking [...] In the predominantly White classroom we represent the "other" point of view. Our knowledge is often questioned, misunderstood or disrespected.

~Latina, Blacks/Latino(a) dialogue

I enjoyed the dialogue because the setting gave everyone an opportunity to have a voice that is typically silenced by this society and in the classroom . Too often, people of color are told that we are "too emotional" and "irrational" by Whites when it comes to discussing issues of race and ethnicity .

~African American woman, Blacks/Latino(a) dialogue

Asking questions that I felt I wasn't able to ask before.

Asking questions is essential to interactive communication. The dialogue process and the facilitators of that process encourage students to ask questions before responding to or commenting on each other's views and experiences. This aspect of asking questions is construed in the dialogue process as a part of learning, and we encourage students to actively listen to each other's perspectives, even when what they hear makes them feel defensive, angry or hurt. Students are also encouraged to ask "taboo" questions, that is, to ask questions which are generally constructed as "the unspeakable" in race talk, or in cross-race social interactions.

This particular dialogue also provided a wonderful opportunity to ask important questions. One white student wanted to know how she could address a fellow white person when that individual insists that a person of color was awarded their (the white person's) spot simply because the hire was a person of color (hence one supposed form of reverse discrimination). I suggested that she could mention that it is a bold assumption on the part of that person to think that they were guaranteed the position and to ask how did they know that someone else was not chosen over them in the first place? It felt good to be able to ask/answer questions and to receive immediate feedback.

~African American man, White People/People of Color dialogue

People in the group were able to ask questions and to speak their mind without being judged.

~White man, White People/People of Color dialogue

Being able to disagree

Verbalizing disagreements is another critical ingredient in an intergroup education process. Participants clarify their views and levels of information regarding an issue, and learn to think about conflict as bearing on interpersonal and intergroup relationships. Moreover, we encourage students to think about not only the interpersonal and intergroup effects of conflict, but the institutional structures and processes that impinge upon intergroup relations and are at the root of much intergroup conflict.

Most students reported acquiring a new perspective on conflict and disagreement through their participation in intergroup dialogues, and on the role of conflict in building relationships:

In the end, I have learned that conflict alone is not a bad thing. It is how we react to this disagreement. The dialogue effectively showed how constant communication helps us resolve such conflict not by necessarily agreeing on everything, but in better understanding and respecting one's feelings and experiences.

~African American man, White People/People of Color dialogue

I was initially afraid of being criticized by other group members. We learned to disagree but not criticize one another [...] I was pleased to participate in a course where I was able to talk about issues which (in a different setting) would arise racial tension if spoken about in the open. In one session, my roommate and I (both Latinas) had a disagreement on the issue of immigration yet we were still able to leave the dialogue as friends.

~Latina, Blacks/Latino(a)s dialogue

Before this dialogue I had tended to avoid conflict, and think that conflict only led to anger and hate. However, now I realize this is not the case. Through our discussions, which did contain conflict, issues were brought out into the open and could no longer be ignored in the name of comfort. Yes, at times I have felt uncomfortable, just as I had initially feared, but that discomfort also resulted in learning and increased understanding and awareness.

~White woman, White Women/Women of Color dialogue

An important dimension for students was challenging their previous notions about with whom they are supposed to disagree. Many students seemed surprised to observe disagreements within their own social identity groups, and even more within the other social identity group. Many students came in expecting that conflict and disagreement would mostly occur between the two social identity groups and not among members of the same social identity group:

One of the exercises we did in the dialogue was for each group to list advantages and disadvantages that we had due to our social group membership [...] When I did the list with my group I was surprised to see some of us disagreeing with each other. I had made the assumption that people who are in the same social identity group also shared the same thoughts but I was soon proven wrong. Members of the other group also disagreed with each other. [That also surprised me because] I went to the dialogue thinking that Black people always agree with each other. I think this is in part due to the fact that I see a lot of unity between Black people on campus that I do not see among Latinos.

~Latina, Blacks/Latino(a)s dialogue

Working through disagreements & conflicts/addressing difficult questions

In stage three of the intergroup dialogue design (see Figure 1) participants are encouraged to address and examine controversial or conflictual issues. The goal of this stage is to facilitate understanding of how different racial/ethnic groups define the conflict, and how institutional and interpersonal patterns of discrimination and oppression may perpetuate inequities which contribute to the conflict. For instance, in inter-racial dialogues, the issue of separation/segregation on campus is typically examined as part of the dialogue design in session 5 or 6. Participants are asked to share their personal views/feelings/reactions to the topic/issue. They are also asked to identify possible reasons for racial segregation on campus and examine the extent to which attitudes toward racial inclusion/exclusion might influence how white students and students of color construct the contours of this emotionally-charged

issue. Participants are also asked to critically examine how institutional racism helps to shape or influence the way the issue is constructed by white students and students of color. To support the discussion of the issue, readings are utilized and conceptual organizers such as levels and types of discrimination (Feagin & Feagin, 1992; Katz, 1978) are used to frame the dynamics that typically emerged in unraveling the issue. For example, it has been observed that white students often tend to see segregation on individual or interpersonal terms while students of color see it as a result of institutionalized discrimination. Similarly, white students often wish to resolve the conflict through interracial friendships outside the classroom, and students of color through more faculty and peer support in the classroom (Duster, 1993; Hurtado et al, 1994). Thus, examining both the personal and institutional levels of intergroup relations and conflict is a crucial dimension of the dialogue process. Understanding that social inequality and intergroup conflict have a structural component, while not losing sight of the fact that these issues “hurt real people”(from both groups), is essential in helping students to develop both more complex and deeper understandings of how systems of privilege and oppression operate as well as compassion for each other. This dual focus also serves as a catalyst for coalitional activism.

Exploring the complexity of specific intergroup issues

An intentional aspect of the intergroup dialogue pedagogy is an exploration of particular issues that reflect intergroup conflict. Examining issues helps make the intergroup relationship and conflict more concrete. Personal experiences of, as well as emotional reactions to, specific issues usually surface during these sessions. In addition, similarities and differences between and among groups in their understandings, experiences, and feelings can often be more readily highlighted around concrete issues. The way in which students dialogue around these specific issues is reflective of a group's intergroup education potential. For example, whether the dialogue participants actively engage or disengage with each other's pain and anger, whether they discuss issues from an individual or institutional level, whether they focus on similarities at the expense of differences or vice versa, whether they focus on understanding or blaming, whether they seek action that is individual or coalitional, suggests different levels of ability and willingness to engage in intergroup education and profoundly impacts the nature of the intergroup dialogue. As an illustration of the power and significance of these issues to the dialogue process, we will thus briefly present an analysis of participant experiences in dialoguing around two specific issues (Stage Three in Figure 1): (a) gender, race and body image in a White women/Women of Color group; and (b) Race, racism and skin color in a Black/Latino(a) group.

Body image is the first of the three issues discussed in the White Women/Women of Color dialogue (Session Four). This issue was selected to encourage the women in this dialogue to explore issues of internalized oppression and race/gender intersections in constructions of “beauty” and women's body image. The two main goals of this session were to develop a deeper understanding of how the issue manifests itself similarly and differently for women and to recognize some of the ways the issue is influenced by institutional manifestations of sexism and racism.

Participants reported that this was quite a difficult and emotional dialogue session due to the very personal nature of the issue for both white women and women of color. Several women commented on some of the ways this issue impacts them:

I am a dark skinned African American woman [...] I could really feel the pain and frustration of [the author...] It made me so angry to think of all these beautifully-toned African women who, after coming into contact with Western “civilization,” were made to feel ugly and undesirable because of their dark skin. I hate to think of them ruining their gift in the failed attempt to appeal to their men. It hurt me so because it is me. I buy

the bleaching creams and wear the powdered makeup about two shades lighter than my actual skin color—trying to be as light as I can. I hate this insecurity.

~African American woman, White Women/Women of Color dialogue

I had a very hard time with the body image class because it is such a big part of my life. I was so amazed at the strength shown by the various women in the class, their courage is something I could only hope to have. Also, I had major fear of being viewed as weak by the others, because I can't be that strong and because I have let society's rules control me.

~White woman, White Women/Women of Color dialogue

Despite the deep emotion displayed, there was not much initial intergroup understanding regarding each other's pain, largely because the lenses through which these women view the issue differ. Whereas most white women discussed gender as being a more salient identity and issues of body size and shape as being central to their experiences of body image, women of color expressed that race is usually their more salient identity and issues around skin color predominate in their experiences of body/beauty image. Often these different conceptions lead white women and women of color to engage in ranking of their respective oppressions:

In our diverse group setting, being an African American woman to me meant that I had different issues to face which the women of color could relate to but the white women could not. For example, when the issues of body image and sexual assault were discussed, the women of color seemed to have a similar perspective.

~African American woman, White Women/Women of Color dialogue

I was disappointed to find out that many of the women of color, primarily those who were African American, disregarded these issues, issues that women need to unite on the most in order to give all women strength.

~White woman, White Women/Women of Color dialogue

Despite these different constructions of the issue and the initial talking past one another that came with it, white women and women of color seemed to experience sincere moments of dialogue around race and gender. For example, for many of the white women, this session highlighted the reality that race matters in their lived experiences of body image:

I also realized in making the collage that the models are overwhelmingly white and even the few token women of color have extremely white features and only really look different from the white models because of the slightly darker hue of their skin.

~White woman, White Woman/Woman of Color dialogue

For me, being a woman is my primary source of identity. It is what I struggle with when I am deciding how to act or react in most situations. However, the dialogue group taught me that the reason I think this way is because I never really had to think about race that much. [...] I began to realize that the reason I didn't think my body image (and my problems with it) were connected to my race was because I saw myself everywhere I looked.

~White woman, White Women/Women of Color dialogue

Likewise, for women of color, the salience of gender in their lives became more clear:

Quite honestly, when instances of discrimination occur, I can never tell if it's because I am black or because I'm a woman—or maybe even because I'm dark. Before [...] I would never have believed that all of these things could, simultaneously, contribute to a single

racist or sexist incident. Now, I know that these things are systemic and they feed off one another. An understanding of the interrelation of these "isms" is essential to eliminating them all [...] Now, when these things occur, I won't bother to try to separate the "isms" into separate entities because they're all the same.

~African American woman, White Women/Women of Color dialogue

In addition to recognizing the multiple layers of their identities and how these intersecting dimensions impact their experiences of the issue, both white women and women of color discussed gaining new insights into the institutional structures that impact their experiences:

One thing we discovered is that we all feel to some degree the societal pressure to be women that cater to our men and keep things quiet that may air dirty laundry.

~African American woman, White Women/Women of Color dialogue

[...] we needed to realize that we were fighting against our own bodies and the bodies of our classmates and friends. In fighting the media images of women we must not put down the women who are being made to portray these images, this makes us fight against one another. Instead, we need to fight against institutions.

~African American woman, White Women/Women of Color dialogue

Moving beyond dichotomies (gender or race matters) and rankings of oppression not only helped both groups of women to develop more complex understandings of how systems of privilege and oppression operate, it also facilitated acknowledging the impact of race and gender intersections on women's lives. This growth also contributed to both groups' realization that they could work together as White Women and Women of Color.

It is extremely difficult to understand your own identity when you are constantly bombarded with white women's standards of beauty. However, this issue involves much more than simply white women's beauty standards. All women should not have to feel the pressure of achieving an unrealistic image of beauty. [...] It was a great feeling to know that the other group sincerely cares for our concerns and experiences.

~Asian American woman, White Women/Women of Color dialogue

Another student who defined her self as a feminist stated:

The dialogue really pointed out to me that we need to integrate [racism and sexism] more. Feminism needs to continue to deal with racism and classism in a big way. Anti-racist and working class movement need to continue to deal with women's issues in a big way.

~White woman, White Woman/Women of Color dialogue.

Skin color was addressed during the fourth session of the Black/Latino dialogue. This issue was selected to encourage students to talk and explore issues of internalized racism and self-hatred, dominant constructions of race, and how these notions may impact the relationship between the groups. Students, particularly African Americans, reported that talking about this issue was not only difficult, but at times confusing and painful because of the ways in which skin color hierarchies were perpetuated not only in society at large but in one's family of origin and one's home communities.

When I was growing up, the question of being Black was never asked, but the color of your skin mattered. My brother and sister used to tease me and make fun of me (because

I was light skinned). I think this may have caused me to dislike darker skinned people at a younger age. I also think that this is why my brother and sister have a better relationship with each other than I have with either of them.

~African American man, Blacks/Latino(a)s dialogue

[Staying out] of the sun was something that several students talked about, particularly Latino students. Some of them said that they were told to stay inside the house during the summer, and wore long sleeve shirts to avoid receiving a tan.

~African American man, Blacks/Latino(a)s dialogue

The discussion of the issue seem to have struck a chord among several of the African American students. Students read testimonial accounts and analytical material addressing the issue in both communities and in society at large. Several Black and Latino students reported being challenged to discover the relevancy of this issue in both communities, and the perceptions (and stereotypes) they had of each other. As one African American woman put it:

Before reading such articles [...] I had always thought that the skin color issue was one relevant only to Blacks. It was very interesting to discover how the issue of skin color figures into the lives of Latinos/Latinas. I had always thought of Latinos as being White [as far as skin color is concerned] and therefore being more accepted in this society because of this. From the readings and the Latinos in the group I learned that the skin color issue is as pronounced as in the Black community.

~African American woman, Blacks/Latino(a)s dialogue

This society always makes everything a Black and White issue. As a Latina I don't seem to fit in [...] the dialogue on skin color and complexion had a great influence on me. I am considered a light Latina because I have a light complexion, green eyes and light hair. I was surprised to find out that other people [through the readings and in the group] also felt the hurt I have felt for being lighter. I have had to deal very often with people teasing me (particularly Latinos) because I was different.

~Latina, Blacks/Latino(a)s dialogue

As students grappled with skin color issues in their own communities, they also addressed this issue in the context of the dialogue. Through the discussion of people's personal experiences, participants were able to realize the extent to which notions of what is "light," "brown" or "dark" are mediated by when and where one grows up, and the constructions of race that prevail at that time and place. They also had to grapple with issues of light skin privilege and the multifaceted aspects of racial oppression in this society.

Skin color has never really been a problem for me. Even though I cannot personally relate to the experiences of African Americans (when it comes to skin color), I can empathize with their feelings and emotions.

~Latina, Blacks/Latino(a)s dialogue

The issue of skin color is important for all people of color to discuss. In the US, I think skin color has very similar effects for Blacks and Latinos. Because of skin color variations in the Latino community, however, it seems that is hard sometimes for Blacks to recognize that Latinos, unless they are dark skinned, are also oppressed due to skin color. On a similar note, white or light-skinned Latinos may be unaware of skin color prejudice if it has not affected them. It seems like conflicts and lack of understanding arise on this issue between the two groups because we will be defined differently according to US standards.

~African American woman, Blacks/Latino(a)s dialogue

The extent to which participants experienced closure around this issue is not clear from their comments and reflections. It does seem, however, that students were able to recognize skin color as a potential source of conflict for Blacks and Latino(a)s, particularly because of the way in which racial minorities are constructed in mainstream society. In addition, it appears that the issue itself encouraged students to begin the process of deconstructing race and expanding their notions of what constitutes a "racial minority" in US society. Lastly, students seem to have been able to understand more fully the notion that "race" is socially, historically and culturally constructed, and that skin color hierarchies are one of the ways in which racial oppression is manifest. This new understanding helped re-frame preconceived notions students had about the issue, and about each other.

Working together "with and across" differences

"What can I do/what can we do:" During the last sessions of a group, dialogue participants identify actions each will take on campus, and in their communities, to bridge the "us/them" divide, and toward the creation of inclusive communities. They also participate in alliance building activities to facilitate closure and to continue the process of developing support across and within racial/ethnic lines to create change. Many students commented on the need to educate people and effect change through same and cross race conversations, discussions and dialogues on campus and in the communities where they live. Students discussed several possibilities for actions at the individual and interpersonal levels from attending courses which address diversity issues from multiple perspectives, to initiating cross race/ethnic social interactions, to taking individual responsibility for their privileges and confronting racism, and other forms of racial bigotry on campus, and in their communities.

To increase and promote substantial dialogue between white women and women of color, we need to branch out. This can be done by attending classes not particular to your own race or gender.

~Asian American woman, White Woman/Women of Color dialogue

I feel I can continue in my daily efforts to bridge social differences. In essence, we must keep talking and listening [...] We must not be so afraid or cautious of members of the other identity group, but also we should expect nervousness and learn to deal with it instead of running from it or burying in it. I won't be so gentle and non confrontational with members of both groups who say things that are ignorant or offensive.

~White women, White Woman/Women of Color dialogue

I feel I can be an ally of women color by taking responsibility for educating white peers and taking responsibility for issues of race and racial discrimination.

~White woman, White Woman/Women of Color dialogue

Students also reported exploring the possibility of becoming involved in peer education programs to educate students -- white students and students of color - about racial and other social justice issues:

Though I cannot and will not end racism by this action alone, it is a powerful thing for each of us to have sat together and talk [...] I hope to be able to practice [what I've learned] as a diversity facilitator [and work] toward practicing and living in non-oppressive spaces.

~White woman, White Woman/Women of Color dialogue

Even though the twelve of us in the group, alone, cannot make the changes that are need within our worlds to gain equality we have definitely learned how to bond and work together to make a difference. We can make a difference through enhancing peer education about minority social issues, developing methods leading to better communication between different races and social groups, and the biggest difference, to eradicate racism out of our cultures.

~Latina, Blacks/Latino(a)s dialogue

In this vein, several students addressed the need for coalitional efforts to bring about just social change:

One of the major things keeping everyone apart -- men and women of all colors, religions, ethnicities, and sexual orientations, is our differences [...] But in order to change the status quo, we can not allow our differences to separate us. We must form coalitions across lines that bind us by our commonalties, while accounting for and appreciating our differences...One valuable lesson that I have learned from this class is that it is both a possible and personally satisfying goal. It is absolutely necessary for everyone to realize that the only way to lift ourselves up, is to lift everyone up.

~African American woman, White Women/Women of Color dialogue

As many of the excerpts in this section illustrate, for most students working at the individual and interpersonal level seemed more realistic than targeting the institutional level. Students not only seemed to be aware of the lack of institutional and societal support for bridge building and just social change but became increasingly aware through the process of dialoguing about some of the complexities involved in process of working across differences in a constructive and critical fashion.

"What are some of the challenges I may face:" Students eloquently commented on the challenges they might face as they work to re-create, and/or apply what they learned in the unique forum of their intergroup dialogues:

The dialogues have been an ideal place in which to learn about the tenuous relationship between white women and women of color which is indicative of race relations in the United States on a larger scale [...] It is so rare that there is a special place and time created to work on problems that play themselves out on every level of life [...] It will be harder to affect change with people that don't see change as a priority, and it will be easier because now I have more tools to work with and a broader understanding that I lacked before.

~White woman, White Women/Women of Color dialogue

Students not only seemed aware of the rare opportunity granted by the small face-to-face social interaction of an intergroup dialogue but also of difficult challenges that await them given how entrenched racism and oppression are in society and institutions of higher education. While the intergroup dialogues in many instances generated or re-invigorated students' passion for anti-racist and multicultural work, many still were grappling at the end of the dialogues with exactly how to use what they had learned.

This has been a great place for me to learn to work with women of color [...It has] deepened my commitment to multiculturalism and given me a renewed hope and energy [...] Seeing how little and how much we could do in seven weeks helped me understand

more thoroughly how entrenched racism is and how important is change at the personal level.

~White woman, White Women/Women of Color dialogue.

I can, as a White woman, listen to others and my own intuition, pay attention to situations and look for the times that I am benefiting from white privilege, and do something about it. What I still have not figured out is how to (really) use my "power."

~White woman, White Women/Women of Color dialogue.

" Are Jews especially racist against African-Americans? Are African American's particularly anti-Semitic? Why, in a complex, multiracial society that sets most marginalized groups at odds with one another, do we even talk about Jewish-Black conflict as something unique?" [...] I had never really thought hard on some of the topics in the readings (and the dialogue). Sometimes that new awareness was not always pleasant. But it was always truly revealing, and opened up new possibilities of thought that I hadn't explored before.

~African American woman, Blacks/Jews dialogue

Thus, in some instances, students viewed potential actions somewhat skeptically, while in others they experienced a sense of hope. Students' ideas about future action involved a mix of enthusiasm and caution.

Discussion and engagement is an essential part of ameliorating animosities [between groups]. Such conversations can be promoted and increased only if both groups have an interest in their future together and want to bring positive change in an open, respectful forum. Creating programs (like this) is the next step in a process of collective healing that will take many decades and the lives of many people working in concert. This dream is beautiful, but is it feasible? [...] I have begun to realize that the fate of the Jewish people is inextricably intertwined with that of Blacks since both groups share a history of oppression with unknown challenges in the future [...] Yet while both groups experience oppression, Jews can often hide behind their whiteness [in this society], creating animosity between Blacks and Jews.

~African American man, Blacks /Jews dialogue

"What do I need to be an effective ally:" The task of exploring future actions with the other group seems to have been addressed differently by the various intergroup dialogues included in this study. In some instances, the thrust seemed to have been in identifying how each group could best support each other in working to redress social injustices and facilitate more positive intergroup relations. In other instances, students reported exploring concrete actions they could take separately, or in collaboration, to advance different social change agendas. For instance, in white women /women of color dialogues, the participants reported talking and examining what they need from each other in order to address various forms of discrimination:

To build alliances we need to open our minds [...] For white women who want to be allies to people of color, they need to educate themselves through research and observation instead of solely interrogating people of color. In order for them to support me, they need to work on racism for their own sake and understand that they will make mistakes along the way. They also need to remember to correct those mistakes and never give up. In order for me to be an ally for white women, I need to be willing to help them get in touch with frustrations they might have about racism. I need to get over the belief

that white women could never know the full horror or brute racism or the oppressions that I have faced. I need to understand that white women have also faced oppression. We all need to understand that the world is here, so welcome and explore it.

~Asian American woman, White Women/Women of Color dialogue

What I really need from the white women to feel supported is just for them to listen and consider what I am saying even if they can not relate to, agree with, or accept it. They cannot expect us to conform to their standards or always be the ones to establish contact with them. I need for them to care about our causes and try to see how our causes are also their causes [...] Finally, I want them to challenge racism whenever they see it [...] I have to remember to meet the world one person at a time and not allow myself to stereotype an entire group. As women of color, we need to make them feel welcome in our groups and causes. Finally, we need to support feminist causes and let the advancement of our gender be just as important to us as the advancement of our race.

~African American woman, White Women/Women of Color dialogue

I feel I can be an ally of women color by taking responsibility for educating white peers and taking responsibility for issues of race and racial discrimination.

~White woman, White Women/Women of Color dialogue

Similarly, students in the Black/Jews dialogue also commented on the importance of alliance and bridge-building work in Black/Jewish relations:

I can support members of the other group on many issues because now I understand more clearly their perspectives and how they feel. For example, if one of my Jewish peers says that Blacks just want affirmative action because it is like welfare, I would explain the historical reasons why affirmative action may be necessary [...] however in order to communicate effectively with members of the other group, I must give a chance to be respected and understood.

~Jewish man, Blacks/Jews dialogue

The most valuable thing I am taking away from this experience is the realization that blacks and Jews are very concerned about survival, even though this means different things to each group [...] I hope to work toward bridging the gap that seems to separate us.

~African American woman, Blacks/Jews dialogue

In sum, while participants entered the dialogues with various anxieties and concerns about race/ethnic relations, and though throughout the course of the dialogues they develop a keen sense of the challenges implicit in learning to work with and across differences, they also experienced "what is possible" and developed skills that allowed them to identify concrete ways of taking action in their communities.

Discussion

The present study gives voice to student experiences in intergroup dialogues. Whereas previous research indicated the efficacy of the intergroup education process (Zúñiga et al, 1995), this study provides an "insider's perspective" into the complex personal and social dynamics that unfold in dialogues. Students comment eloquently about different aspects of the intergroup dialogue process and experience. A salient theme concerns the personalized nature of the intergroup contact and the quality of interactive communication. Despite initial caution and

anxiety, many students comment on the value of participating in a non-judgmental environment where they can ask "taboo" questions, make mistakes, and share experiences, feelings, opinions or limited understanding of a particular issue. Through this intensive process, students challenged internalized stereotypes, learned about racism, white privilege and internalized racism, developed sensitivity to the complexities of gender and awareness of anti-Semitism and Jewish oppression, and began to understand some of the intricate interactions of privilege and oppression.

Another salient theme is the role of conflict, and its constructive use, in unraveling the complexity of issues such as "body image" in a White Women/Women of Color dialogue or "skin color" in a Black/Latino(a)s dialogue. Recognizing some of the complexities of intergroup relations and integrating this recognition into their personal analyses allowed students to challenge simplistic notions about oppression and race relations such as dichotomous ("black/white") thinking, either/or (race vs. gender) positions and ranking of oppressions. Finally, "talking and thinking about action" was a significant theme, though students' approaches to this varied considerably. Students recognized that they are all "part of the solution" and need to support each other either by collaborating or by working toward common goals within their respective communities. Participating in an intergroup dialogue process engendered hope toward this end and offered "glimpses" of how to make it happen.

Practice implications

This study suggests that a process of experiential and problem-posing education can be particularly helpful in multicultural education efforts. Several critical ingredients of success are evident in the analysis. Students, especially students of color, underscored the importance of diversity and balanced group composition as a critical ingredient in this process. Students also reported that meeting on a regular basis over a two month period, writing weekly journals, and reading articles contributed to their learning and growth. It is interesting to note the value students placed on the readings, particularly those concerning testimonials (in addition to more conceptual material), current issues (e.g. California's Proposition 187), controversial issues (affirmative action, immigration), and working across differences. These readings provide students with an opportunity to explore difficult issues, gain basic information and facts about the issue, and challenge misinformation. Thus, multicultural activities based on intergroup contact must include intellectual and conceptual input as well as direct encounter and exchange. Finally, working with two facilitators, one from each of the identity groups participating in the dialogues, was also found by participants to be extremely helpful. The co-facilitation team sets the tone for working with and across differences; it models the possibilities of alliances and coalitions that are perhaps rare in the campus contexts of estranged intergroup relations.

Future Research

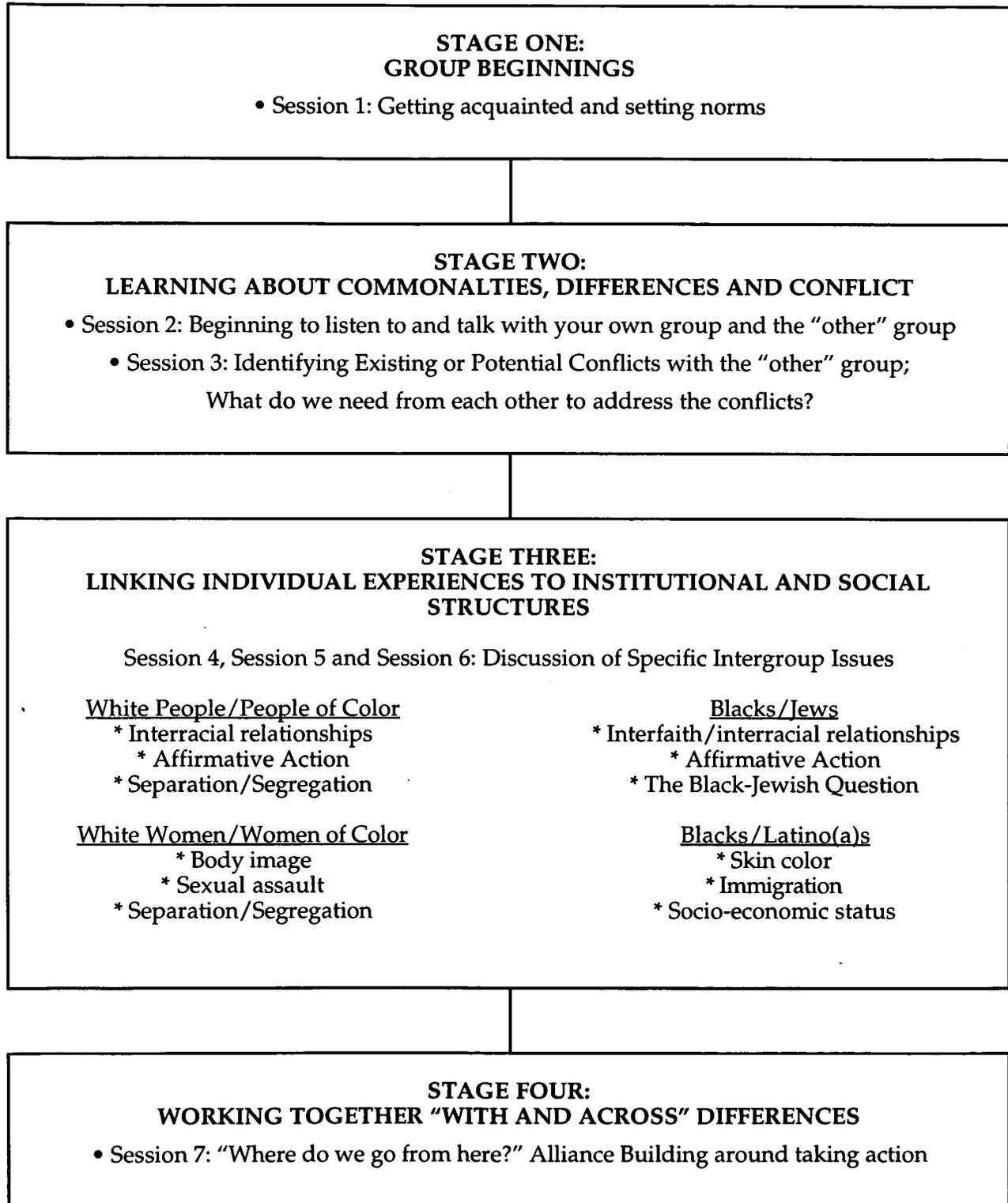
In future research, we hope to continue to explore this data to learn more about how students of color and white students experience the dialogues and about how dialogues involving other social group identities (e.g. Men and Women, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Heterosexual) may be similar to or different from dialogues focusing on racial/ethnic identities. Similarly, it would be important to examine the conditions which deter, or impede constructive intergroup education processes across intergroup dialogue experiences. In a different vein, it would be interesting to examine how students articulate their learning in relation to the findings of our previous research e.g. becoming more aware of self and others, becoming more socially aware, and developing a more positive approach to conflict. Undoubtedly, as we continue to listen to the data, it will provide us with new insights and additional hypotheses about the

usefulness of intergroup dialogue as a social justice pedagogy approach to improving intergroup relations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, student reflections provide a rich source of data which support earlier findings that the process of intergroup education contributes to student learning about social relationships and issues. Furthermore, they offer new and exciting insights into how and why they become more socially aware, learn about self and other, gain a new outlook on conflict and difference, and explore ways to take action to address social injustices.

FIGURE 1: STAGES OF INTERGROUP DIALOGUE



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- 1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the conference of the American Educational Research Association, April 1996 in New York, NY.
 - 2 Please direct comments or inquiries regarding this paper to: Ximena Zúñiga, School of Education, University of Massachusetts at Amherst, 159 Hills South, Amherst, MA 01002.
 - 3 We would like to thank Mark Chesler, Eric Dey and Jane Mildred for their thoughtful comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper.
 - 4 These excerpts are drawn, with students' consent, from final reflection papers describing students' experiences in intergroup dialogues.
 - 5 The Program on Intergroup Relations and Conflict is a unit of the Division of Student Affairs at the University of Michigan. It originated in 1988 through a Presidential Initiative funding grant to the Pilot Program (a living-learning program for first-year students) and the Program on Conflict Management Alternatives (an interdisciplinary research and development center based in the College of Literature, Science and the Arts). In addition to the intergroup dialogues, program activities include courses and mini-courses addressing theories and practices in intergroup relations and conflict. Since 1992, the intergroup dialogue program has been institutionalized under the Division of Student Affairs, and the academic courses in four units of the College of Literature, Science and the Arts - Program in American Culture, Psychology, Sociology and Women's Studies. To date, 2500 students have participated in intergroup dialogue activities.
 - 6 The authors of this paper were actively involved in designing and implementing the course as well as on-going action research efforts. Zúñiga and Sevig were co-instructors of this course; Vasques and Nagda served as consultants to co-facilitation teams.
 - 7 A large proportion of this sample is comprised by women, predominantly White and African American. Most of the Latina students in the sample were enrolled in the Blacks/Latino(a)s intergroup dialogue, and a very small proportion of Latinas (2), Asian Americans (3) and Native American (1) women students enrolled in the White People/People of Color or White Women/Women of Color sections.
 - 8 The specific items making up the intergroup education scale used in the quantitative analyses of the earlier study focused on three dimensions--communication, conflict and coalition (Zúñiga et. al, 1995). The items representing these dimensions and around which the present qualitative analysis revolved included: (a) sharing my views and experiences; (b) asking questions that I felt I wasn't able to before; (c) addressing difficult questions; (d) being able to disagree; (e) working through disagreements and conflict; (f) talking about ways to take action on social issues; and (g) exploring ways to take action with people who belong to groups different from my own.

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