

Like a Bridge over Troubled Waters: The Value of Joint Learning Programs in Intergroup Identity-Based Conflict in Israel

Authors : Rachelly Ashwall, Ephraim Tabory

Abstract : In an attempt to reduce the level of a major identity-based conflict in Israel between Ultra-orthodox and secular Jews, several initiatives in recent years have tried to bring members of the two societies together in facilitated joint discussion forums. Our study analyzes the impact of two types of such programs: joint mediation training classes and confrontation-based learning programs that are designed to facilitate discussions over controversial issues. These issues include claims about an unequal shouldering of national obligations such as military service, laws requiring public observance of the Sabbath, and discrimination against women, among others. The study examines the factors that enabled the two groups to reduce their social distance, and increase their understanding of each other, and develop a recognition and tolerance of the other group's particular social identity. The research conducted over a course of two years involved observations of the activities of the groups, interviews with the participants, and analysis of the social media used by the groups. The findings demonstrate the progression from a mutual initial lack of knowledge about habits, norms, and attitudes of the out-group to an increasing desire to know, understand and more readily accept the identity of a previously rejected outsider. Participants manifested more respect, concern for and even affection for those whose identity initially led them to reject them out of hand. We discuss the implications for seemingly intractable identity-based conflict in fragile societies.

Keywords : identity-based conflict, intergroup relations, joint mediation learning, out-group recognition, social identity

Conference Title : ICICSIT 2018 : International Conference on Intergroup Conflict and Social Identity Theory

Conference Location : Paris, France

Conference Dates : April 19-20, 2018