Coexistence Is in the Eye of the Beholder: Evaluating Intergroup Encounter Interventions Between Jews and Arabs in Israel

Ifat Maoz*

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

This article presents a paradigm of process evaluation of intergroup contact interventions that has two objectives: (a) to classify intergroup encounters by their ideology and (b) to define and apply criteria that evaluate the quality of intergroup interaction, focusing on symmetry between members of both groups in active participation in the encounter. This paradigm was applied to evaluate 47 encounters programs between Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs that were classified into two major approaches—those that emphasize coexistence and similarities between the sides and those that emphasize conflict and confrontation. Equality in participation of Jewish and Arab participants was found in the vast majority (89%) of programs. However, symmetry between Jewish and Arab facilitators varied and was higher in programs including confrontational elements.

This article presents a paradigm for evaluating intergroup contact interventions that focuses on symmetry or equality in the interactions between the two groups in these encounters. This paradigm is applied here to evaluate a sample of 47 different programs of planned encounters between Jews and Arabs in Israel that were conducted in the year 1999–2000 and supported by the Abraham Fund for Jewish-Arab coexistence. The first part of the article presents the conceptual

*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Ifat Maoz, Department of Communication, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Mt. Scopus, Jerusalem 91905, Israel [e-mail: msifat@pluto.msc.hji.ac.il].

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framework that serves as the basis of the evaluation paradigm. The second part describes the construction of categories and definition of criteria within the evaluation paradigm and its application. Finally, the conclusion to this article discusses the findings of the evaluation research and their implications.

**Conceptual Framework**

The paradigm presented here for classifying and evaluating intergroup interventions builds on and combines elements from the two existing approaches to the study of contact interventions: the traditional approach that studies quantifiable outcomes of such contacts and a more recent approach that offers a more qualitative study of processes and interactions within the encounter. I will briefly outline each of these approaches and describe the present approach.

**Approaches to the Study of Contact Interventions**

*Outcome Measurement Focused Approach*

A major theory that addresses attempts to improve intergroup relations through encounters is the Contact Hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Stephan & Brigham, 1985). According to this theory, intergroup contact can, under certain conditions, be effective in reducing hostility and prejudice and in creating more positive attitudes between the groups (see Ben-Ari, this issue). Many studies were conducted to investigate the predictive ability of the Contact Hypothesis. Most of this research compares the attitudes of participants before and after intergroup contact in an attempt to determine if contact that meets the required conditions is indeed effective in improving intergroup relations (Cook, 1984; Pettigrew, 1998). Such studies produced mixed results. Some support the predictions of the Contact Hypothesis, and others refute them (Mackie & Smith, 1998). However, a recent meta-analysis of studies of contact effects (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000) found that contact under the conditions stipulated by Allport does improve intergroup attitudes. Nevertheless, a fundamental problem of research based on the Contact Hypothesis is that most of these studies relate to the outcome rather than to the process of the encounter (Pettigrew, 1998). When there is no clear description or conceptualization of what takes place during the encounter itself, it is very hard to draw unequivocal conclusions about changes that result from the encounter. This shortcoming is especially pertinent with regard to contact between natural groups, either ethnic or national, that have tension or hostility between them. Although, for contact studies held in laboratory conditions, one can control the encounter and claim uniform procedures in the intergroup contact; during encounters between natural groups a variety of processes are taking place and diverse contents emerge that must be understood
in order to comprehend the results of the encounter (Maoz, 2000b; Stephan & Stephan, 2001).

*Process Analysis Focused Approach*

In light of this criticism a more process-oriented approach to the study of intergroup contact has emerged and gained prominence since the 1990s that takes into account the sociopolitical context of the encounter. This approach includes studies that define and discuss processes and dilemmas that characterize contacts and encounters between Jews and Arabs in Israel (Bar & Bargal, 1995; Bargal, 1990; Bekerman & Horenczyk, this issue; Hertz-Lazarowitz, this issue) as well as studies of processes and psychological mechanisms in workshops of Israeli-Jews and non-Israeli Palestinians (Kelman, 1998). Also included within this approach are studies that take a critical perspective on planned Jewish-Arab contacts and focus on the asymmetrical power relations between both groups and on power struggles and processes of identity construction in such encounters (Maoz, 2000a; 2000b; Rouhana & Korper, 1997; Bar-On & Kassem, this issue; Bekerman & Horenczyk, this issue, Halabi & Sonnenschein, this issue; Suleiman, this issue). Finally, this approach includes studies by Salomon (this issue), by Bar-Tal (this issue) and by Bargal (1990; Bar & Bargal, 1995) that offer a conceptualization of the domain of coexistence and peace education interventions.

*The Present Approach*

The approach presented here attempts to integrate the two existing approaches to the study of contact by examining the process of the encounter and the interaction within it and defining clear categories and criteria for their classification and evaluation while taking into account the sociopolitical context of the encounter.

*The Sociopolitical context of the Jewish-Arab encounter.* Two main characteristics of the sociopolitical context in which the planned encounter between Jews and Arabs in Israel takes place are particularly relevant for the attempt to conceptualize, classify, and evaluate encounter interventions:

1. Relations of conflict and coexistence. The Jewish-Arab encounter in Israel takes place in the context of a complex reality in which, simultaneously, there are relations of coexistence, closeness, and cooperation and of hostility and conflict (Bar-On & Kassem, this issue; Suleiman, this issue). Together with examples of neighborly relations, cooperation, and closeness between Jews and Arabs, the encounter also takes place in the context of conflict between Israel and the Arab countries in general and in the midst of ongoing conflict between Israelis
and Palestinians, that has increased in intensity in the recent period. Moreover, in the context of the historical and political events of the recent period—which have undermined relations between Israelis and Palestinians, and the social, economic, and religious processes that took place within Israel—tension also has increased between Jews and Arabs who are citizens of the state of Israel.

2. Lack of equality (asymmetry). Relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel are characterized by asymmetry in which Jews generally have more access to resources, power, and senior positions and also have a greater role in setting the cultural, religious, and language norms of the country (Dwairy, this issue; Suleiman, this issue).

In light of these two elements, the planned Jewish-Arab encounter can be seen as an experiment of a somewhat paradoxical nature, the goal of which is to create within the encounter an internal reality of symmetry and cooperation in the context of an external reality having significant elements of conflict and asymmetry (Maoz, 2000b). In the context of the sociopolitical reality described above in which the Jewish-Arab encounter is embedded, it is important when studying this encounter to relate to two key aspects of the relationship between the microreality of the encounter and the macroreality outside: (a) The extent to which what takes place during the encounter reflects the conflictual components of the Jewish-Arab reality, as opposed to the extent to which the encounter expresses elements of coexistence: closeness, commonalities, and cooperation, (b) the degree of symmetry in power between Jews and Arabs in the encounter.

Our evaluation approach relates to each of the above aspects differently. The degree to which the conflict is given expression in the content and character of the encounter constitutes a basic classification dimension that categorizes encounters by the extent they tend toward the pole that emphasizes closeness and commonalities (also known as the coexistence pole) versus the extent to which they emphasize confrontation. No assumption is made about one type of encounter being better or preferable to the other type. Only an attempt is made to clarify under which conditions the confrontational models are more common and in which conditions the models of coexistence are more likely to appear. On the other hand, symmetry or equality in power within the encounter is posited here as a fundamental criterion for evaluating the encounter activity. Based on major formulations of intergroup contact and its utility (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998), it is presumed here that a symmetrical contact is preferable and more effective than an asymmetrical one in creating intergroup rapprochement and that contact in which members of one group dominate the others can powerfully reinforce status differences (Ridgeway, 2001). The criterion of symmetry between encounter groups, therefore, allows comparison of encounter activities and evaluation of these activities’ suitability to building relationships between the groups.
Evaluation goals and research questions. The above conceptualization leads to the specification of the following two steps in the evaluation of Jewish-Arab encounters. The first, and basic, step is performing a conceptual classification of encounter interventions in terms of the coexistence versus confrontational emphasis in their goals and underlying ideology. The second step is defining and applying standards for evaluating the quality of intergroup interaction in such interventions focusing on the criterion of symmetry in power between the participating groups. The next part of this article will demonstrate how these evaluation steps were operationalized and applied in a study evaluating Jewish-Arab encounter programs in Israel that addresses the following two sets of major research questions:

1. How are the programs in the research population distributed in terms of their confrontational versus non-confrontational ideology? Given that confrontational models may be less suitable for younger participants (i.e., preschool or elementary school children) who may find it hard to cope with difficult emotional contents (Stephan & Stephan, 2001), do we find a lower prevalence of confrontational elements in programs targeted at these age groups?

2. How are programs in the research population distributed in terms of the degree of symmetry in interaction within them? Do we find different ratios of symmetry in confrontational versus nonconfrontational models?

Application: Evaluation Study of Jewish-Arab Encounters in Israel

Description of the Research Site

Typically (and this is also true for the programs investigated here), encounter programs consist of a series of intergroup meetings between Jews and Arabs held at a frequency that varies between weekly and monthly and generally extends from three to four months to a year. These encounters are usually facilitated by a Jewish and an Arab facilitator and are conducted in the framework of educational and communal institutions and organizations.

The Research Population

The research population consisted of 47 encounter programs between Jews and Arabs that took place in Israel in 1999–2000 and were funded by the Abraham Fund for Jewish-Arab coexistence. The programs’ participants ranged from preschool children to adults (mostly teachers and university students; see table 1 for distribution of programs by target age groups).
The Research Methods

The following sources of data were analyzed in this study: (a) 110 Interviews with directors, coordinators, facilitators, and participants of the encounter programs (for each program, at least one Jewish staff member or participant and one Arab staff member or participant were interviewed). (b) 47 observations (one observation of each program) of the encounter meetings. (c) 58 documents relating to the encounter program (at least one major document such as a project proposal, or an activity report for each program).

The Research Tools

During the course of the research, the following tools were used:

1. Observation Form: A form for recording the observations of encounter meetings that includes (a) factual background data about the encounter, such as where and when it took place, and (b) evaluation of the intergroup interaction in the encounter in terms of the symmetry in the interaction on two numerical scales. The first one rates the degree of symmetry between Jewish and Arab participants in active participation in the encounter and the second one rates the degree of symmetry between Jewish and Arab facilitators in active participation in moderating the encounter. Also included in the form is a narrative description of contents, processes, and dynamics that were observed in the meetings.

2. Program Form: A form for recording data about the encounter programs that included (a) general background information and facts about the encounter program, such as name of the program, names of its directors, and so forth, and (b) a description of the encounter program along various classification dimensions that included the goals and underlying ideology of the program and its target age group.

The Research Procedure

For each encounter program, a program form and an observation form were filled out by the author and the members of the evaluation team, which included one Arab Israeli evaluator and one Jewish Israeli evaluator. Another Jewish Israeli evaluator participated in part of the research. These evaluators directly observed and recorded meetings in each of the programs and rated the symmetry in the interaction within them. The reliability among evaluators in the ratings of symmetry in interaction was Alpha Cronbach = 0.87 for the participants measure and Alpha Cronbach = 0.85 for the facilitators measure. Following that, a comprehensive statistical analysis was conducted of all the classifications and evaluation ratings.
that were collected from the individual programs using the Statistical Package for
the Social Sciences (SPSS) data analysis program.

Definition of Categories and Findings

Classifying Encounter Programs in Terms of Goals and Ideology: Classification Categories

The first stage of our study included classifying encounter programs in terms
of their goals and ideology as described by the directors and program coordina-
tors in the interviews conducted with them and in organizational documents. Each
interview or document was classified by at least by two evaluators (each evalu-
ator separately) into goals and ideology categories based on detailed instructions
developed for this study. In 44 out of the 47 programs there was a full (100%) agree-
ment between evaluators on the classification of the program. The three remaining
programs, in which full agreement was not reached between the evaluators, were
labeled “unclear” in terms of their goals and ideology.

Two main approaches, or models, were identified and defined, reflecting
two poles on a continuum, from emphasizing coexistence to emphasizing the
conflict. A third model, the mixed model, combined elements of the two main
approaches.

The coexistence model. At one end of the spectrum is the traditional co-
existence model, in which programs seek to promote mutual understanding and
tolerance, reduce stereotypes, foster positive intergroup attitudes, and advance
other goals in the spirit of the Contact Hypothesis (Allport, 1954). This model
emphasizes the commonalities and the similarities and supports a feeling of to-
getherness and connection between the two nationalities that it seeks to promote
through formats such as joint work toward a common goal.

The confrontational model. At the other end of the spectrum is the confronta-
tional model, where programs emphasize the conflict and power relations between
the sides. The goal of these programs is to modify the construction of identity of
the members of the minority and majority groups and to instill greater awareness
among Jewish participants about the asymmetrical relations between Jews and
Arabs in Israel and of their role as a dominant or oppressive group. This model
seeks, also, to empower the members of the Arab minority by having them expe-
rience direct confrontation with the Jews, which includes discussion of national
identities, national and civil aspirations, and discrimination (Suleiman, this issue;
Halabi & Sonnenschein, this issue).

The first category of activity draws its rationale directly from major theories of
intergroup relations (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998) and is a prevalent encounter
model used in several conflict sites around the world. On the other hand, confrontational models represent a dynamic that can often be seen in educational or social interventions, where theory often lags behind practice. This model can be found in several key organizations in Israel that conduct Jewish-Arab encounters, but is not described in the professional literature about intergroup contact and does not appear in descriptions of coexistence interventions from other parts of the world. However, a theoretical rational for such programs that emphasize group identities may be suggested by social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; see also Suleiman, this issue). The confrontational model is a clear product of the needs and dynamics in the field and was first presented by Arab facilitators and participants, with some Jewish colleagues then joining this approach (Maoz, 2000a, 2000b).

The mixed model. In addition to the two major models described above, a third category of “mixed” models was also identified. These models include components of coexistence (i.e., emphasizing commonalties) and confrontation (i.e., emphasizing the conflict and asymmetrical power relations). The story-telling model described by Bar-On & Kassem (this issue), and the narratives exchange model described by Salomon (this issue) can be seen as belonging to this category, a category that involves both political-intergroup and interpersonal dimensions.

Findings: Distribution of Encounter Programs by Ideological Approach and Age Group

Table 1 addresses the first set of research questions and presents the distribution of encounter programs according to their ideology and the age of the participants of the program.

The data in this table reveals that most of the encounters (approximately 60%) were based on the ideological model of coexistence. A lower proportion (some 21%) represented a mixed model, and only a few (13%) reflected the confrontational model. In addition the data indicates that there is a clear relationship between the ideological approach and the age group addressed. Thus, the confrontational model appears in about a quarter of the interventions aimed at the older groups of youths (high school students) and adults, while it does not appear at all in the interventions involving preschool children or those in grades 1–8 that are almost completely dominated by the coexistence model. As noted here before, this policy of not exposing younger children to confrontational contents is consistent with recent theorizing and research presented by Stephan & Stephan (2001) in their review of multicultural education. The authors suggest that the effectiveness of intergroup interventions is dependent on the degree to which the program is suited to the cognitive, social, and emotional abilities of students from the target age group. Thus, older students may be more able to openly discuss sensitive issues related to the relations with the outgroup, while younger students may not be yet
### Table 1. Number and Percentage of Programs Reflecting Various Ideological Approaches by Age Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideological Approach</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Preschool Children</th>
<th>Grades 1–4</th>
<th>Grades 5–8</th>
<th>Grades 9–12</th>
<th>Adults</th>
<th>Total Row</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Coexistence</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>60.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confrontation</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclear</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Column</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

equipped to handle the emotional difficulties created by discussions of racism and ethnocentrism with members of the other group (Stephan & Stephan, 2001). Thus, it seems that the distribution found here, of the confrontational model across the different age groups, may represent an effective match between the nature and contents of the program and the abilities of the target population.

**Evaluating Symmetry in Interaction in Intergroup Encounters: Defining Evaluation Criteria**

The second stage of the study involved evaluating the encounter activities in terms of symmetry or equality between Jews and Arabs in the interaction within them. The degree of symmetry between Jews and Arabs in the intergroup interaction is regarded here as a key principle in evaluating the encounter process. In the classical literature about the Contact Hypothesis, intergroup symmetry is considered as a critical factor in the ability of the encounter to improve the relations between the groups (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998). Studies and interventions conducted according to the Contact Hypothesis have defined symmetry as an equal number of participants from each group, and the participants coming from a similar socioeconomic background. These studies did not relate to other aspects of symmetry, such as the power relations in the interaction of the groups during the meeting. However, more recent literature about Jewish-Arab encounters in Israel and the relationship between the encounter and the external sociopolitical reality does address the issues of power relations, control, and dominance during and
around the encounter (Halabi & Sonnenschein, this issue; Maoz, 2000a, 2000b; Suleiman, this issue). These studies, however, do not clearly define criteria for symmetry and do not include a systematic evaluation of the relations of symmetry dominance that take place in the encounter activity.

The present research aims to fill this gap by defining criteria for evaluating symmetry in the encounter process that relate to the degree to which members of both nationalities participate equally in the interaction during the encounter activity. There are several reasons why, in this research, symmetry during the encounter activity is regarded as a major criterion for process evaluation of such interventions, a criterion that cuts across the different ideological models identified before and is relevant both to the coexistence and the confrontational encounter models. First, in light of the asymmetrical relations between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority in Israel, an encounter based on symmetry between the two peoples can constitute a basis for the participants to improve their attitudes toward each other and learn about more egalitarian relations. On the other hand, a meeting that replicates the external asymmetry could serve to reinforce existing negative attitudes and relations in which one group is dominant or regards itself as superior to the other.

Second, a symmetrical meeting that is based on principles of procedural and distributive justice represents a more equitable distribution of the resources available to the participants (Tyler & Smith, 1998). In educational activity such as the coexistence encounter, which has a defined goal of educating for values such as mutual respect, justice, and equality of rights (see Bar-Tal, this issue), it is important to apply these principles in reality (Stephan & Stephan, 2001), rather than to illustrate the contradictory principle-glaring injustice in the distribution of resources.

Criteria of Symmetry in Active Participation

The evaluation criteria defined and used in this study relate to the degree to which there is symmetrical or equal active participation of Jews and Arabs during the encounter, both at the level of participants and of facilitators. At the level of participants, this measure relates to the degree to which Jewish and Arab participants actively participated in the discussions and activities within the encounter. A numerical scale was created for rating the degree of symmetry in active participation between Jewish and Arab participants in the encounter. On this scale, 1 represents maximum Jewish dominance in the interaction, where 90–100% of the active participation was dominated by Jews, whereas 9 represents maximum Arab dominance, with 90–100% of the active participation dominated by Arabs. A rating of 5 reflects symmetrical participation of Jews and Arabs, with active Arab participation being 40–60% of all the participation in the encounter.
At the level of facilitation, this measure relates to the degree of active participation of the Jewish and Arab facilitators in moderating the encounter activity. A second numerical scale was created for rating the symmetrical facilitation of Jews and Arabs. On this scale, 1 represents maximum Jewish dominance in facilitation, where 90–100% of the facilitation is carried out by the Jewish facilitator. A rating of 9 represents maximum Arab dominance, where 90–100% of the facilitation is carried out by the Arab facilitator. A rating of 5 represents symmetrical participation of Jews and Arabs in the facilitation, with active Arab facilitation being 40–60% of all the facilitation in the encounter. Both these measures were rated by the researcher and the evaluation team that directly observed the encounter meetings and recorded the interactions and verbal exchanges within them. The ratings were based on a coding sheet and a coding instructions booklet prepared for this study that included detailed guidelines as to how to record behaviors and interactions in terms of symmetry.

Findings: Symmetry in Active Participation in Encounter Programs

Tables 2 and 3 address the second set of research questions and present the distribution of ratings of symmetry in active participation of Jewish and Arab participants (see Table 2) and of facilitators (see Table 3) in encounter programs according to the ideological approach of the program. Because of the low number of cases, ratings 1 through 3 were combined (medium to very great Jewish

| Table 2. Rating of Symmetry in Active Participation of Participants, by Ideological Model |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------|
|                                 | Number              | Coexistence     | Confrontational |
|                                 | % of Row            | (Nonconfrontational) | Elements |
|                                 | % of Column         |                  |             |
| Rating of Symmetry in Participation of Participants | 1–3 | Medium to Very Great Jewish Dominance | 66.7 | 33.3 | 6.8 |
|                                 |                     | 7.1              | 6.3         |
|                                 | 4                    | 6                | –           | 6 |
|                                 | Slight Jewish       | 100.0            | –           | 13.6 |
|                                 | Dominance           | 21.4             |             |
|                                 | 5                    | 18               | 11          | 29 |
|                                 | Symmetry            | 62.1             | 37.9        | 65.9 |
|                                 |                      | 64.3             | 68.8        |
|                                 | 6                    | 1                | 3           | 4 |
|                                 | Slight Arab         | 25.0             | 75.0        | 9.1 |
|                                 | Dominance           | 3.6              | 18.8        |
|                                 | 7–9                 | 1                | 1           | 2 |
|                                 | Medium to Very Great Arab Dominance | 50.0 | 50.0 | 4.5 |
|                                 | Total               | 28               | 16          | 44 |
|                                 | Column              | 63.6             | 36.4        | 100.0 |
dominance) and ratings 7 through 9 were combined (medium to very great Arab dominance) for each of the symmetry measures. In order to enable a comparison between nonconfrontational models to models that include some degree of confrontational elements (whether fully confrontational ones or mixed ones that are partly confrontational), and because of the relatively low number of cases in the categories of confrontational and mixed models, we grouped programs from these two latter categories together when comparing them to coexistence models (the three programs belonging to the unclear category were not included in the present calculations).

Table 2 shows that the vast majority of programs (89%) were rated as fully symmetrical or near symmetrical in terms of the active participation of participants. Only a very small number of programs were found to have medium to great dominance in active participation of either the Jewish or Arab participants. The data further indicate that there was no marked difference in the degree of symmetry between programs that followed nonconfrontational (coexistence) models and those that included confrontational elements. In each of the above categories, the majority of programs (88%–89%) were rated as fully symmetrical or nearly symmetrical.

Table 3 indicates that full symmetry or near symmetry in active participation of Jewish and Arab facilitators was found in about 45% of the programs. In 45% of the programs, the Jewish facilitators were rated as showing medium to great dominance. In a small number of programs, the Arab facilitators were rated as dominating the facilitation. The data further indicate that there was marked
difference in symmetry between programs that followed the nonconfrontational (coexistence) model and those that included confrontational elements. While in the coexistence category 32% of the programs were found as fully symmetrical or nearly symmetrical in active participation of facilitators, in the category of programs including confrontational elements we find that 68% of the programs were rated as symmetrical.

Finally, a comparison of the distribution of ratings of the symmetrical participation on the participants and facilitators measures indicates that there are marked differences in the distribution of the encounter programs on these two measures. The frequencies suggest that a much higher proportion of programs were rated as symmetrical or nearly symmetrical with regard to the participants in comparison with a lower proportion rated symmetrical with regard to the facilitation. Correspondingly, the frequencies suggest that the proportion of programs rated as showing medium to great Jewish dominance in active participation of participants is much lower than the proportion of programs showing Jewish dominance in active participation of facilitators.

Conclusion

The present study conducted a process evaluation of intergroup encounter interventions that included two steps: first, categorizing such interventions according to their coexistence or confrontational ideology and goals, and second, defining basic criteria for evaluating such interventions in terms of symmetry of the interaction within them. The evaluation findings show that 89% of the programs studied here were symmetrical in terms of active participation of participants in the interaction with no significant difference between nonconfrontational encounter models and those including confrontational elements. Symmetry between facilitators was found in 45% of the programs, and there was medium to high dominance in active participation of Jewish facilitators in another 45% of the programs. In addition, programs including confrontational elements were found to be more symmetrical than nonconfrontational ones in terms of active participation of Jewish and Arab facilitators.

In line with the statistical findings, the descriptive data from the observations of the Jewish-Arab meetings revealed that symmetry in the active participation of Jews and Arabs was, in many cases, treated very differently on the level of participants and on the level of facilitators. Our observations revealed that many encounters were highly structured by the facilitators to ensure an equal division of participation between the Jewish and Arab participants (e.g., by alternating turns to speak or by alternating Arabs and Jews in the games or exercises conducted). It is interesting to note that this seemingly high awareness by the facilitators in many programs to ensure symmetry between participants marks a change from Jewish-Arab encounter programs studied in the eighties in which many instances
of asymmetry between Jewish and Arab participants were seen (Maoz, 2000a, 2000b). A prevalent pattern was found then in which the Jewish participants were more active and dominant in the encounter activities while Arabs were more passive and less involved. Such a pattern may have been caused by the unsuitability of the encounter programs to the goals and needs of the Arab participants (Rouhana & Korper, 1997). Nevertheless, it led to or enhanced, in many cases, negative intergroup intrinsic attributions and stereotyping on the part of the participants and staff involved in these encounters (see Maoz, 2000a and 2000b for a more detailed description of these studies). This pattern may have caused the encounter to be counter effective in improving certain intergroup attitudes. Instead it confirmed preexisting unfavorable ones (i.e., seeing the Jews as domineering and controlling and the Arabs as passive, less competent, and unreliable) that were not displayed in the encounter programs studied here.

The emphasis on symmetry in active participation of Jewish and Arab participants in the vast majority of programs observed in this study—in 1999–2000—may indicate that learning has occurred on the part of encounter organizations and professionals in the past decade. Professional organizers, directors and facilitators of encounter programs may have become, as their experience in the field accumulated, more aware of the importance of having both sides actively participate in the encounter. However, these changes toward greater symmetry can be also attributed to changes in the wider sociopolitical context of Jewish-Arab relations in Israel in the relevant period that included empowerment and increased emphasis on issues related to national identity and equal rights among parts of the Arab society. Nevertheless, this awareness only partly generalized to the level of facilitators. Observations revealed marked variability in the extent of symmetry between Jewish and Arab facilitators in moderating the encounter. In some activities there was an equal division of participation between Jewish and Arab facilitators in leading the activity. However, in other activities there was a pattern of Jewish dominance and Arab passivity in facilitation.

In this respect, it is interesting to see that the programs including confrontational elements in our sample provide the situational context in which more symmetry in facilitation is displayed than in nonconfrontational coexistence programs. A possible explanation to this difference is that confrontational approaches put more emphasis on issues of asymmetry and on the possibility of the outside sociopolitical reality of majority-minority relations penetrating the reality of the encounter and influencing it. This may bring those involved in such models to pay more attention and grant more importance to ensuring symmetry between facilitators in the encounters.

Interestingly, the findings of the present study resonate with findings of the previous wave of research on encounters in the eighties. While as mentioned above, the previous research generally found dominance of Jewish participants in the encounter, this pattern was especially characteristic of the parts of the encounters
where neutral topics unrelated to the conflict were discussed. On the other hand, in parts that were dedicated to discussing the conflict, there was more symmetry in participation of Jews and Arabs, and even Arab dominance (Maoz, 2000a, 2000). A tentative comparison between the results of these two waves of encounter research points to a possible occurrence of a process of evolution in regard to symmetry in the encounter interaction. A development or change is led by the more confrontational elements and is later disseminated, also, to the non-confrontational models. While in the eighties, symmetry in active participation of participants was found only in parts of the encounters that dealt with the conflict in the present research we find a dissemination of this symmetry that is revealed both in nonconfrontational models and those including confrontational elements. Similarly, one may hope that the symmetry in active participation of facilitators, that was currently found mostly in models including confrontational elements, will be propagated and found in a decade or so also in nonconfrontational models.

On the level of participants, the results of the present study are encouraging, implying that encounter interventions, regardless of the ideological model that guides them, fulfill process evaluation standards of high symmetry and equity between members of the two groups. However, these results show, also, that symmetry may depend, also, to some extent, on the measure used and is less prevalent in regard to the participation of Jewish and Arab facilitators. Moreover, the measures used in this study that relate to certain quantifiable aspects of the intergroup interaction may be limited in their ability to capture the broad picture of symmetry in the encounter. One can think of other measures of symmetry, equity, and social justice that could be used in intervention processes or procedures and perhaps lead to different results. One possibility is a structural measure of the extent to which there is symmetrical or equal representation of Arabs and Jews in the different levels of the staff conducting the encounter program. Yet another possibility is to assess the subjective perceptions of the participants concerning symmetry and dominance in the encounter interaction. Defining and applying such measures could enable future studies to grasp additional aspects in evaluation of symmetry or equity in the process of encounter interventions.

References


DR. IFAT MAOZ, a social psychologist, is an assistant professor in the department of communication and Journalism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Dr. Maoz received her PhD in social psychology (on cognitive biases in negotiation) from the department of psychology at Haifa University, Israel. Her main research interests are evaluation of intergroup contact interventions, peace building, and reconciliation through dialogue, patterns of communication, and interaction between groups in conflict and cognitive-perceptual mechanisms in conflict and negotiation.