"What We're Doing Requires a Lot of Love": Dialogue and Vulnerability as Methods of Community Building on Clark University's Campus

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Abstract

This thesis explores the relation between dialogue and vulnerability on Clark University's campus. It examines how dialogue and vulnerability can aid in building community across social divides that exist on the campus. It also examines the ways in which students' resistance to vulnerability acts as a barrier to dialogue. The paper examines these themes in relation to Clark's Difficult Dialogues program, which is an initiative focused on hosting and facilitating Intergroup dialogues centered around community building and social justice.

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"The moment we choose to love we begin to move towards freedom"— bell hooks

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"At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality."

— Ernesto "Che" Guevara

Introduction

Vignette

It was 2017, the summer before my first year of high school. I was just beginning to figure out who I was as a person. I was fourteen and felt like I was the smartest person in the world. No one was like me, I knew more than all my peers in school and therefore, I was better than them. I could not wait to start highschool, but I was even more ecstatic to return to my overnight camp for my fifth summer. I was placed in an *ohel*[1] (tent/bunk) with all my best friends, life could not be better. That summer for the first time in my years at camp I participated in *peulot* (education dialogues), not because I felt pressured to, but because I actually enjoyed them and believed that I had thoughts and ideas worth bringing to the dialogues. I think it was because I was feeling so confident in myself and my beliefs that what my counselor said during one *peulah* had such an impact on me.

I remember that we were in the *MoMa*, a large air conditioned building that always smells like feet because you cannot wear shoes inside. The *peulah* that day was about different protest movements and we were doing a thermometer activity about how we perceived various protest methods; we were supposed to go to one side of the room if we supported/ agreed with the method and the other side if we did not support/ agree. I do not remember what the first few methods we were given were -- I think they were actions like a boycott or sit-in, definitely mainly non-violent options. We all agreed with the non-violent methods and shared back about the importance of civil disobedience.

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[1] My camp, like many other Jewish overnight camps, uses a combination of Hebrew and English words to describe various buildings and blocks of the day. I have elected to leave them in here and provide translations as I believe that the wording provides a more accurate depiction of my camp.

Then my counselor, Micaela, asked us our feelings about rioting. We all walked towards the "do not support" side of the room. When she asked us why we felt that way I remember specifically stating that violence and harm can never be justified. She let us speak our minds for a few minutes and then had us all return to our circle. In the circle she looked at us plainly, as if we were her equals, and explained how white supremacy had affected our thinking. She not only told us that we were wrong, but that it was okay and explained to us the violence and harm that oppressed peoples often endure before they rise up against their oppressors. We had a lengthy discussion about these topics and I find myself reflecting on that dialogue often.

For years I wondered why, out of all the educational experiences I had during my years at camp, this story is the one that stood out to me the most. In an attempt to pin-point why I asked a few of my friends what they appreciated most about this moment. A couple friends said that they appreciated that, though she disagreed with us and was seven years our senior, Miceala spoke with us like equals and respected our thoughts and opinions. Another highlighted her willingness to engage in a conversation with us even though many of us were set in our beliefs and did not change our opinions in the end; this friend emphasized that Miceala's commitment to us as people and our learning and growth is what made this interaction so influential.

As I will elaborate on more later[2], in a successful dialogue all partners are engaging with the others present fullest selves. In the dialogue we had that day, we engaged each other's full being and identities by questioning narratives that we had been taught all our lives. We were a group of mainly upper-middle-class white Jewish teenagers who had never questioned the status quo in a meaningful way; we supported climate activism and LGBT equality but never thought much about the intersectional ideas or identities behind these movements.

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[2] See section titled "What is Dialogue" on page 14 for a more in-depth theoretical framing

After that day, dialogue became a place where I could delve into different ideas and learn more about my identity and positionality within the greater cultural context. I spent much of the next few years seeking out spaces where I could take part in dialogues that would contribute to my overall growth as a person. I quickly grew frustrated with both my high school and family's lack of desire for social change through community building and dialogue; I could not wait until I could attend college and be constantly surrounded by dialogue. I would be able to understand the world so much better then.

When I arrived at Clark University in the fall of 2021, I was expecting to find dialogue all around me. Part of the reason I chose to attend Clark was the school's focus on building community and questioning the status quo. Yet I found that dialogue is not as common here as Clark's advertising would want one to believe. Over the course of my time at Clark I have seen the administration ignore the demands of students time and time again. Further, various groups within the student body itself often appear to be very disconnected from each other. Overall, Clark's campus often feels isolating as relationships between students are often heavily strained. A survey conducted by Clark in partnership with the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium found that about 75% of undergraduate students felt like the campus had tensions related to difference.

Research Questions

For most of my time at Clark I was a part of this institutional culture of silence. I did not really interact with many people outside of my social group and I seldom participated in class discussions and rarely if ever sought out other opportunities for dialogue. I was content living in my own bubble. I wrote many papers about the importance of questioning and challenging the status quo, but I rarely, if ever, took any meaningful action myself.

I learned about the Difficult Dialogues (DD) program my sophomore year, when Eric promoted an event the group was having to a class of his that I was in. Though I thought the event sounded really interesting, I elected not to go for a few reasons. One reason is that my friends at the time thought the event sounded "lame" and "cheesy" and they questioned what could even be accomplished through dialogue. I was -- and occasionally still am -- a deeply insecure person; I was definitely not going to do anything my friends thought was weird. Additionally, I was afraid of what the other people in the group would think about me. What if I said the wrong thing or made a fool of myself? I decided it was better to just stay safely in my bubble, then try to make any changes.

The DD program is explained in greater depth on page 31, but I am providing a brief summary here for the purposes of situating my research questions and action plan. DD as it exists now is an updated version of a Clark wide program that existed in the mid-2010s. The current program's full name is "Difficult Dialogues on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion;" it focuses on building community engagement and inter-group solidarity through dialogues that are connected to issues within the Clark community or our larger global community.

For years I hid from dialogue, I never shared anything about myself to anyone. I was content with my bubble. In the spring of junior year I started work on my CYES praxis project, which was originally about community at Jewish overnight camps. My Jewish overnight camp is still a large aspect of my life, and I often wrote about experiences there for other CYES papers, so it felt like a good fit. I attempted to work on the project over the summer, but I quickly grew tired of it. I was at a dead-end and I had no idea what to do.

At the same time, I was having many conversations with friends about the uptick of pro-Palestinian activism that occurred on our respective university campuses since the events of

October 7th 2023. Though we all attended a variety of colleges across the United States and Canada, I found a common theme; no one was having meaningful dialogue with people they disagreed with. For the most part everyone was staying in their own bubbles. I decided I wanted to focus my project on creating a space where individuals of varying identities across the political landscape could come together and discuss their various opinions and hopefully move towards greater shared understanding.

After discussing my project with Professor Jie Park, she suggested I look into the concept of Intergroup Dialogue (IGD) and how it has been used to create democratic spaces of social justice on university campuses. Further, after more discussion with Jie and with people in my praxis cohort, I elected to partner with the DD program. I made this choice as they have been doing very similar work to what I wanted to do and I wanted my project to help bolster their efforts, not work against the group.

Working with Jie, I came up with two research questions that I hoped to answer through interviews with the DD fellows and by taking field notes in their meetings and facilitating dialogue sessions. The first question is

△ **What is preventing people on Clark's campus from having "difficult" dialogues?**

Through this question I wanted to learn the barriers that prevent students at Clark from engaging in dialogue that may be difficult. In this context, I am using 'difficult' to mean a dialogue that may make them uncomfortable as it pushes a person out of their safety bubble. Further, when one knows what the barriers to 'difficult' dialogues are, it becomes easier and more tangible to actually work to dismantle those barriers.

△ **Question 2 -- How does open dialogue create opportunities for social change at Clark?**

Through this question I wanted to learn the impact that dialogue has when creating opportunities for social change. Clark students often talk about their desire for social change, but are hesitant to form relationships that are needed to have actual solidarity across various social groups. Therefore, I want to see how/if open dialogue can help facilitate these relationships and if these relationships can become a catalyst for social change.

Action

As stated above, I elected to work with and support the DD program as I believe that the work they are doing is highly important and crucial to social justice coalition building. Based on my own experiences participating in dialogues, I know that dialogue can be a very impactful medium and I wanted to aid the group in the work that they do. Over the course of this project I supported the DD group in many ways. I helped spread awareness of events by assisting in designing and posting flyers around campus and on social media, so that more people would be aware of upcoming events.

Further, I also worked with two other students to plan and facilitate a dialogue about solidarity in 2025 for the Clark community. I participated in group meetings and gave support and feedback on ideas when asked. Oftentimes I felt like an odd-man-out in the group and at first really struggled to find my footing. I did not feel like I was smart or experienced enough to be in the group. However, as time went on I slowly became more comfortable with everyone and shared more of my own thoughts and opinions.

Positionality and Identity

Traditionally, this section is situated within the Methodology section of the paper, however, I have chosen to include it here. I made this choice because this project has caused me to question my own identity and worldview daily, so I thought it apt to properly situate the reader in my positionality, before continuing into the paper. Further, I want to show my growth through this paper by beginning with where I have been and ending with where I wish to go and grow.

The Suburbs

Whenever people ask me where I am from I always answer, the suburbs of Chicago. Especially here at Clark -- just about 1,000 miles away from my childhome home -- people reply to that statement with another question. They wonder why I always specify that I am from the suburbs rather than the city; they often note that I am the only person from the area in a space, there is no need to be so specific. And these people are right -- there is no real need to be so specific so far from home, yet I continue to differentiate every time.

There are two main reasons for my insistence on differentiating. The first is that, among people from Chicago and other similar cities, it is seen as bad form for people to say they are from the actual city when they are indeed from the suburbs. A few years ago, I was out in New York City with a few friends who actually grew up in Chicago. We were chatting with a few of their friends and when the friends asked where I was from I replied, simply, "Chicago." My friend immediately and loudly interjected that I was not actually from Chicago, like she was, but a suburb about 20 minutes outside the city. I insisted that it is not that different and we were hundreds of miles away from home anyway, but my friend was insistent.

The second reason behind my emphasis on suburbs is rooted in my parents' journeys from their childhoods in the city, to choosing to buy a home and raise a family in the suburbs.

My dad grew up in the Hollywood Park neighborhood of Chicago's north side, right by Kimball and Bryn Mawr. His family was middle class and was involved with and connected to the large Jewish community in the area. Other than when he attended college, my dad continued to live in various neighborhoods around Chicago's north side, until he and my mom bought my childhood home (where they still reside), in the suburb of Wilmette in the mid 1990's.

For the first seven years of her life, my mom lived on the south side of Chicago in a neighborhood called South Shore. My mom and her two older sisters shared one bedroom; their beds were all lined up together and there was little space in between them or for anything else in the room. In June of 1969, my mom and her family moved the family about 36 miles north to the suburb of Highland Park. They were not unique in this move: my mom's cousins also chose to leave the city for the suburbs during this summer. Moving to the suburbs was a choice that was only growing in popularity every year. My mom and aunts all agree that their move to the suburbs was definitely a manifestation of white flight.

Though they lived in various places throughout their twenties, all three sisters eventually chose to raise their families in the suburbs that their parents fled to. My parents made a conscious choice to raise me in the suburbs and send me to a Jewish day school, where I would only encounter students who looked like and had very similar backgrounds to me. This decision affects my everyday life even now, when I am over a thousand miles away.

When I think back on my K-12 schooling, I never encountered anything that made me question the status quo of what I was raised in. In both my home growing up and in school, I was often taught about the so-called "Black-Jewish Political Alliance" (Cohen, 2018). However as I grew older I soon learned that the narrative was not so simple; narratives never are. Every year in school on or around Martin Luther King Jr. day, we would learn about Rabbi Abraham Heschel

who "famously "prayed with his feet" as he marched alongside King in Selma, Alabama" (Cohen, 2018). We were told that Jewish people all across the country supported the Civil Rights movement in whatever ways they could.

Now that I am older I know that the story I had been taught as a child, much like most other things children are taught about the Civil Rights movement, was simplified and sanitized. I now know that many Jewish people were not comfortable engaging in the movement because they did not want to risk their own status. Similarly, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) recently announced that it will be pausing its anti-bias focused education program, in favor of focusing more on "antisemitism education" (Kane, 2025). History is repeating itself. Jewish people are choosing the illusion of their own personal safety over collective solidarity.

Moving forward, I want to place myself in positions where I will have to have uncomfortable and difficult dialogues. I want to question traditional narratives and work to build solidarity and community with people who I would have never encountered in my sheltered suburban upbringing.

Am I a Good Person?

A few weeks ago I was on the phone with my dear friend Jacob when I asked him, "am I a good person?" He quickly answered yes and told me that I was being ridiculous, but I, a person extremely prone to hyperbole, had never been more serious in my life. After Jacob gave his answer we sat in silence for a few moments; Jacob knows me well enough to know that my question, though maybe silly, had some level of deeper meaning to it. I then said to him, "sometimes I feel like everyday I have to wake up and convince myself that I am a good person, people like me, and the work I am doing is towards a greater good." Jacob said what he always says when I am in a self-deprecating state, that "yes obviously I am a good person, and yes

people do like me, and yes the work I am doing is for the greater good." Though, he no doubt phrased the previous statement in a much more eloquent and kind way than I have written here. I have always said that he is a far better person than me.

I have spent as long as I can remember worrying about whether or not I am a good person. I have probably spent about 20 minutes in total thinking about what it actually means to be a good person. Similarly, I have always worried about doing and being enough, that I have never even questioned what 'enough' actually looks like. Honestly, I do not know a lot of things and I need to accept that I will always be learning; but accepting that fact, like most things, is easier said than done.

Throughout this project I constantly wrestled with whether I was 'doing enough' without ever actually considering what 'enough' means to me. This project forced me to reckon with what it means to leave an impact on something or someone; this project challenged me everyday. There were many days where I wanted to quit and take the easy road, but I could not. I understood the importance of this project not just to me, but to both the Difficult DIalogues program and Clark University as a whole. I continued to push myself and demonstrated to myself time and time again that I am enough.

Theoretical Framework

What is Dialogue?

In order to fully define and theorize Intergroup Dialogue (IGD) I feel that I first must explain what dialogue is and how it differs from other forms of discursive engagement, namely discussion and debate. Dialogue is defined by Merriam-Webster (n.d.) as the following: "a conversation between two or more persons […] C: a discussion between representatives of parties to a conflict that is aimed at resolution" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Paulo Freire (1968/2014) defined dialogue as "the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world"[3]. I have chosen to include both of the previous definitions in an effort to provide a complete and full picture of what dialogue is.

In classroom settings, discussion is often used for collective, intentional decision making and to aid in the development of self-awareness (Nagda & Gurin, 2007). Debate is utilized as a method for students to grow their "evidence-based thinking on issues, develop verbal presentation skills, and strengthen abilities to influence others by defending one's position and countering differing positions" (Nagda & Gurin, 2007, p. 37). Dialogue differs from the previous two forms of engagement as it focuses on "build[ing] a relationship between participants that engages the heart as well as the intellect" (Cytron-Walker et al., 2013, p. 4). The chart below further elaborates on the difference between dialogue, discussion, and debate.

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[3] I will elaborate on Freire's thoughts on dialogue later in this section.

Discussion	Debate	Dialogue
Conceptual and/or conversational	Competitive	Collaborative, towards a sense of community understanding
Presents ideas, often in a "clean" or "sophisticated" way	Succeed or win, often by proving others' logic to be 'wrong'	Re-evaluate and acknowledge assumptions and biases
Share information, seek 'neutral' conclusions	Focus on 'right' and 'wrong' through evidence	Bring out areas of ambivalence
Seek answers and solutions	Look for weakness	Look for shared meanings
Give answers, often those in accordance with academic standards	Search for flaws in others' logic; critique their position	Discover collective meaning; reexamine and destabilize long held ideas
Listen to find places of disagreement or to gather rational pieces of an argument	Listen to form counterarguments	Listen without judgment and with a view to understand
Avoid areas of strong conflict and difference	Focus on conflict and difference as an advantage	Articulate areas of conflict and difference
Retain relationships	Disregard relationships	Build relationships
Avoid silence	Use silence to gain advantage	Honor silence

The Dialogue vs. Discussion table was adapted from: *Differentiating Dialogue From Discussion: A Working Model (Kardin and Sevig, 1997)* and *Exploring the Differences Between Dialogue, Discussion, and Debate (Tanya Kachwaha, 2002, adapted from Huang Nissan, 1999).*

Chart from The Campus Dialogue & Deliberation Center at The University of California, Davis

Martin Buber (translation by Kaufmann 1970) illustrated how dialogue differs from other forms of discursive engagement by describing and comparing two distinct relations, the I-It and the I-You. Buber wrote that "the basic word I-You can only be spoken with one's whole being. The basic word I-It can never be spoken with one's whole being" (Buber & Kaufmann, 1970, p.54). The "I-It" relation can be linked to debate and discussion, while the "I-You" resembles dialogue. Buber further expanded on the "I-You" relation, writing

> when I confront a human being as my You and speak the basic word I-You to him, then he is no thing among things nor does he consist of things. He is no longer He or She, limited by other Hes and Shes, a dot in the world grid of space and time, nor a condition that can be experienced and described, a loose bundle of named qualities. Neighborless and seamless, he is You and fills the firmament. Not as if there were nothing but he; but everything else lives in *his* light. (Buber & Kaufmann, 1970, p. 59).

According to Buber, when a person is engaging in an I-You relation, or dialogue, with another, they are unlocking their own limitless being and seeing themselves, as well as whomever they are engaging in dialogue with, as the most full and complete versions of their beings.

Similarly, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Paulo Freire (1968/2014) wrote that "dialogue cannot occur between those… who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them" (Freire, 1968/2014, p. 88). In dialogue, all participants must recognize the fullness of the other participants' identities and viewpoints, even if they do not agree with them. Freire wrote that

> Dialogue further requires an intense faith in humankind, faith in their power to make and remake, to create and re-create, faith in their vocation to be more fully human (which is not the privilege of an elite, but the birthright of all). Faith in people is an *a priori* requirement for dialogue; the "dialogical man" believes in others even before he meets them face to face (Freire, 1968/2014, pp. 90-91).

Therefore, in order for productive dialogue to occur, all participants must view each other as complete and full beings. In thinking back to Miceala I am always struck by the amount of respect she held for us before, during, and after that interaction. I do not remember the exact words she spoke with, but I remember that she always treated us with respect and saw us as our full selves in relation to her full self.

Now that I am older, I have been in Miceala's shoes a few times, and I always attempt to view the youth I am working with as their fullest selves, not just one thing. I know that as Freire (1968/2014) frames it:

> False love, false humility, and feeble faith in others cannot create trust. Trust is contingent on the evidence which one party provides the others of his true, concrete

intentions; it cannot exist if that party's words do not coincide with their actions. To say one thing and do another—to take one's own word lightly—cannot inspire trust. To glorify democracy and to silence the people is a farce; to discourse on humanism and to negate people is a lie (p. 91).

In order to work towards building a better world I need to trust in my community and view everyone as the fullest versions of themselves. If I want to be seen as the ever evolving and growing person that I know myself to be, I have to trust that others are learning as well.

Goals of Intergroup Dialogue[4]

Unlike debate, the goal of dialogue and IGD is not to prove that one individual is correct but rather that all parties come to understand the others participants' perspectives and can adjust, question, or expand their worldviews accordingly (Brenner & Friedman, 2015; Ganesh & Zoller, 2012; Gurin-Sands et al., 2012; Judkins, 2012; Lopez & Zúñiga, 2010; Nagda & Gurin, 2007; Sorensen et al., 2009). Therefore, when considering what makes an IGD successful, it should be framed as a way to build connection and community, rather than a competition. In their study of Arab-Jewish IGD groups, Brenner and Friedman (2015) attempted to address the lack of concrete measures and definitions of success for IGD groups. After reviewing the literature on the subject as well as conducting interviews with long term participants of IGD groups across the country, Brenner and Friedman created

three main dimensions that could become criteria for the success of any intergroup dialogue: (1) a shift from one-dimensional thinking to an ability to live in both worlds; (2) A 'rippling out' momentum – or expansion to include people outside the group and the larger community and (3) the resilience that enables the group to stay in relationship despite conflict (Brenner & Friedman, 2015, p. 141).

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[4] The origins of Intergroup Dialogue will be explored further in the Literature Review

While not all of these dimensions must be present at the same time, they provide a strong framework for what constitutes success in an IGD setting. Having a strong framework for accomplishment within IGD enables me to better understand both the obstacles to a successful IGD and the ways in which dialogue acts as a vehicle for social change. Much of the literature about IGDs occurring on college campuses name similar goals to the ones described above. From their research, Lopez and Zúñiga (2010) organized the educational benefits of IGD on college campuses into three categories:

> *Intergroup understanding* includes how students think about intergroup relations in the context of broader society, including students' awareness of structural causes of group inequalities. *Intergroup relationships* include affective and motivational aspects of group interactions, such as desire and ability to connect with individuals across groups through empathy (being aware and feeling connected to experiences, perspectives, and emotions of others) or bridging difference (sharing experiences and educating and learning about others). *Intergroup collaboration* captures students' engagement in individual and collective actions that address bias and challenge institutional discrimination (Lopez & Zúñiga, 2010; Emphasis in original, p. 38).

These outcomes are shown in Chang et al. (2006) study about the educational benefits of long term interracial interaction through IGD. In the study (and others similar to it), the authors found that students who experience more cross-racial IGDs are more accepting of others that are different from them, experienced growth in both their critical thinking skills and their general knowledge base, and had higher self confidence in social settings when compared to their peers who did not participate (Chang et al., 2006; Judkins, 2012).

Furthermore, Rodríguez et al. (2018) investigated IGD effects on student engagement with their own racial and ethnic identities as well as engagement with and attitudes towards those with differing identities. The study concludes that IGD participants who engaged the most with others about their racial and ethnic identities during the program were additionally more likely to become involved in social justice efforts which focused on decreasing inequality and improving race relations (Rodríguez et al., 2018). Additionally, in a study examining student support for intergroup cooperation as a development of their involvement in an IGD course Ross (2014) found that the majority of students believed in building strong cross racial coalitions. These studies demonstrate that, when facilitated correctly, IGD on college campuses can result in positive outcomes for all students involved.

Importance of Building Trust and Vulnerability

One of thinker and activist adrienne maree brown's (stylized as such) principles of emergent strategy is that "there is a conversation in the room that only these people at this moment can have. find it" (brown, 2017, p. 41). To me, this idea signifies the importance of forming connections with those in your community or people who may not seem to be in your community.

This idea is further built upon by bell hooks (stylized as such) who wrote that she often searches for places outside of academia where she can engage in meaningful dialogue with others. hooks wrote about a dialogue that she took part in, that occurred at a restaurant in the South. During the dialogue, hooks (1994b):

> sat for hours with a diverse group of black women and men from various class backgrounds discussing issues of race, gender and class. Some of us were college-educated, others were not. We had a heated discussion of abortion, discussing

whether black women should have the right to choose [... A woman present] gave thanks that our meeting, our theorizing of race, gender, and sexuality that afternoon had eased her pain, testifying that she could feel the hurt going away, that she could feel a healing taking place within. Holding my hands, standing body to body, eye to eye, she allowed me to share empathically the warmth of that healing. She wanted me to bear witness, to hear again both the naming of her pain and the power that emerged when she felt the hurt go away (pp. 73-74).

hooks notes that much of the meaning of the conversation came from the fact that it did not occur within an academic environment. She highlighted that one "black women [sic.] present who had been silent for a long time, [...] hesitated before she entered the conversation because she was unsure about whether or not she could convey the complexity of her thought in black vernacular speech" (hooks, 1994b, p. 73). Traditional academic settings silence women of color and other marginalized voices, making people believe that they are 'not smart enough' to engage in theorizing their lived experiences. By convincing these groups that they cannot engage in theory, academia maintains the status quo.

The aforementioned woman was able to challenge the status quo through her vulnerability and trust of those in the space. Another of brown's principles of emergent strategy is that movements need to "move at the speed of trust. Focus on critical connections more than critical mass -- build resilience by building the relationships" (brown, 2017, p. 42). It is hard to engage in meaningful dialogue with people that you just met and it is crucial to acknowledge that it often takes time to build the trust needed to do so. However, when there is time and space allotted for trust and vulnerability to bloom, the resulting dialogue will prove to be more fruitful for all parties involved.

Safe, Growth, and Danger Zones

Dialogue encourages participants to leave their 'safe-zones' and enter their 'growth zones' (see figure one for diagram). Two dilemmas arise from this responsibility; the first is that many students are not accustomed to leaving their safe zones and therefore will be very hesitant to do so. Secondly, there is no set definition of what any of these zones look like as each individual person has different levels of comfortability with different topics.

Figure 1.

Many students are hesitant to leave their safe zones, especially in unfamiliar settings. Therefore, it is the facilitators responsibility to create a space where participants feel safe so that they can move into their growth zones. Further, it is also the responsibility of the facilitator to ensure that participants do not enter their danger/panic zones, which can create lasting harm. Navigating these zones can be difficult, which is why it is important to enter IGD and other dialogic spaces with care and assume best intentions of all participants.

Literature Review

To find articles for this literature review and for the praxis paper as a whole, Jie recommended I search the terms "'intergroup dialogue' 'social justice' 'higher education'" together as such on Google Scholar as well as to read articles by Ximena Zuniga. Jie also

recommended I read Jennifer Kim Majka's thesis titled "In Defence of Social Justice: A Qualitative Study on an Intergroup Dialogue Programme in American Higher Education" and Brynn Keevil's praxis thesis paper titled "The Role of Relationships in Difficult Dialogues: An Exploration of Vulnerability and Freedom." These articles and studies provided crucial insights that helped shape my understanding of what IGD is and how it is viewed in various research settings.

Additionally, I noticed what authors and articles were commonly cited among these readings and read those articles as well. I would also look through the citations of the articles and theses after I had finished reading them to see if they would be applicable to my praxis paper. If they were I would search for them on either the Clark library system or through Google Scholar and the process would start over. This process differed slightly in the case of *I and Thou* (Buber & Kaufmann, 1970), which I first read in my senior year of high school and have returned to many times since for various reasons. When I learned that many scholars attribute this work as one of the foundational texts of theoretical dialogue (Ganesh & Zoller, 2012), I decided to reread it.

Origins of Intergroup Dialogue

IGD was mainly developed by faculty members at the University of Michigan during the 1980s which was a period of heightened racial tensions for colleges across the country. The use of dialogue in education can be traced back to the work of John Dewey and the other influential educators behind the progressive democratic education movement of the 1930s and 1940s. It also connects to Buber and Kaufmann (1970) and Freire's (1968/2014) writings on dialogue and Allport's (1954) "conditions for positive intergroup contact—equal status, acquaintance potential, and interdependency" (Cytron-Walker et al., 2013, p. 6). The theory behind IGD is

rooted in "the assumptions that interpersonal and cross-group relations on campus are affected by the histories and current realities of intergroup conflict in the United States and that these conflicts must be explored through dialogic encounters" (Cytron-Walker et al., 2013, p. 3).

Further, IGD differs from other forms of discursive engagement "as it focuses on intergroup understanding and action while having students study and address the roots and consequences of structural inequalities" (Lopez & Zúñiga, 2010, p. 35). IGD is unique as it acknowledges that nothing exists in a vacuum. The conversations that occur in a classroom are affected by the world outside of the room. Additionally, while IGD prioritizes understanding and challenging current systems of inequalities, practitioners also aim to spread "understanding and [articulate] how the process of learning about such knowledge is designed and facilitated to foster self and collective awareness, affective ties, and social justice commitments" (Cytron-Walker et al., 2013).

Intergroup Dialogue Structures and Processes

Oftentimes, IGD's occur as university courses that students may enroll in for credit. The students engage in dialogue with each other as well as learn about the theory behind IGD over the course of the semester. These courses are typically offered through universities American Culture, Education, Psychology, Sociology, Social Work, or other similar program or department and focus on a theme relating to social justice and identity issues, such as race, gender, or sexuality. Courses normally have between twelve and eighteen students

> with fairly equal numbers of students from each of the social identity groups brought
> together through the dialogue course (based on student self identification). Working
> toward this balance is helpful in acknowledging the historically unequal status across

groups and the frequent unfair assumption of, or burden on, individual students representing (what is perceived as) the "whole group" (Lopez & Zúñiga, 2010, p.36). Additionally, there are often two facilitators for an IGD; one from each social group represented. IGD often occurs through a four stage model. The first stage is allowing the participants to build and form relationships with one another. The goal of this period is to allow the participants space to explore what dialogue is as well as create strong relationship foundations with each other. It is the responsibility of the facilitators to create a safe space for the participants and begin to explain to them how dialogue differs from discussion and debate. Additionally, during this stage community guidelines are established and participants share what they hope to gain from this experience (Cytron-Walker et al., 2013).

The second stage of IGD focuses on exploring commonalities and differences between various social groups. The main goal of this stage is consciousness raising, but further developing relationships between participants remains a priority. In the third stage of IGD, participants begin to engage in "dialogue about controversial topics or hot-button issues that cause tension between people of different social identity groups. The topics selected for discussion vary according to the focus of the intergroup dialogue" (Cytron-Walker et al., 2013, p. 29). During this stage participants are encouraged to share their own perspectives on and experiences with the topic. Facilitators encourage participants to be vulnerable and explore their growth zones during this stage.

The final stage of IGD focuses on action planning and alliance building; it shifts the focus "from reflection and dialogue to taking individual and group actions with others" (Cytron-Walker et al., 2013, p.30). The action plans can either be small individual actions that each participant will attempt to incorporate into their daily lives, such as calling out racist friends

or family members, or larger scale actions like organizing a teach-in about sexism on campus. One group can decide to enact more than one action, "attention is paid to building alliances and developing collaboration in and across social identity groups" (Cytron-Walker et al., 2013, p. 31). Additionally during this stage facilitators and participants alike should "acknowledge everyone's contribution to the dialogue process and celebrate the collective effort" (Cytron-Walker et al., 2013, p. 31).

While IGD's are not required to follow this structure -- especially if, like DD, they are not offered as a part of a class -- it is a helpful pedagogy to follow. Further, the structure is often not linear and participants flow "may flow back and forth between stages as participants address and work through relationships and issues in the dialogue. Practitioners using the design may also need to adjust the topics covered in each stage to match specific group dynamics or participants' needs" (Cytron-Walker et al., 2013, p. 31).

Challenges and Barriers in Intergroup Dialogue

As IGD is a process that requires a great deal of vulnerability and a high reliance on emotions, a challenge can often be to encourage participants to open up to the group. White et al. (2021) conducted a series IGDs about gender to a group of STEM[5] faculty at a large university in the United States. They found that, as STEM fields often rely heavily on objectivity, so too did their dialogue participants and they were not as willing to share personal and/or emotional experiences. Additionally, many participants had "had negative experiences sharing about similar topics in the past and [did not want] to offend others" (White et al., 2021, p. 248). These negative experiences prevented many of the participants from desiring to share their emotions again.

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[5]Common abbreviation for science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Further, Dessel and Ali (2012) conducted a qualitative analysis of interviews and papers from students in an IGD course focusing on relations between Arabic and Jewish peoples. While many students reflected on friendships built throughout the course and how the course allotted them an opportunity to understand one another's perspectives, others reported that they experienced no change in their thinking or mindsets. Some Jewish students within the group

> had an extremely difficult time recognizing any privilege that they might hold, either in Israel or in the United States related to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Although some acknowledged privilege, particularly in relation to being white, others expressed confusion and anxiety, and referenced the strong history of Jewish victimization related to the Holocaust, and the precarious state of Israel being surrounded by Arab countries (Dessel & Ali, 2012, p.574).

The authors noted that "there is still much work to be done with regard to how the asymmetry of power influences recruitment, process, and outcomes of intergroup work" (Dessel & Ali, 2012, p.574). Just beauce a person engages in all the stages of an IGD does not necessarily entail that they will be able to recognize the power they may hold in certain situations; IGD cannot just erase problems overnight or even over the course of a semester. It is just one aspect of a framework for change.

Joslin et al. (2016) conducted a study aimed at facilitating IGD between lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) and (heterosexual) conservative Christian communities in a graduate school social work program. There have historically been tensions between the two groups and the IGD sessions attempted to ease them. The study had many challenges that further complicated its narrative. The first challenge is that

Although according to dialogue pedagogy and based on power differentials in society, LGB people would be considered the oppressed group. A number of the secular-LGB participants and a Christian-heterosexual participant discussed that the Christian-heterosexual students assumed the position of the oppressed group because of their negative experiences in the social work program (Joslin et al., 2016, p. 550).

This dilemma is interesting because, though LGB often experience more injustice than Christains in most contexts, within the social work school, there is a counter narrative. As the facilitators and researchers had not planned for that counter-narrative, many students had difficulty engaging in the dialogue, as it was not fully accurate to their experiences.

Another dilemma raised in the article is that people who identified as both Christain and LGB struggled to feel fully connected to either group. As IGD's are normally comprised of one group with social privilege and another that is 'oppressed' those "who identified as LGB-Christian meant that a 'middle' group existed comprised of individuals who held both privileged and oppressed identities simultaneously" (Joslin et al., 2016 p. 551). This dilemma complicates the traditional structure of IGD as people often hold various differing identities; each identity has a unique influence on a person and it is crucial to acknowledge such.

Gaps in the Literature About Intergroup Dialogue

The literature presented above explains the history and theory behind IGD as well as explaining the structure of it. It also challenges traditional narratives of IGD. While the challenges do show some barriers to IGD, they do not explain the connection between vulnerability and social change. Moreover, the above literature does not look at the roles that trust and vulnerability play when attempting to break down barriers to open dialogues; nor does

the literature examine how trust and vulnerability can be utilized to enact social change on Clark University's campus.

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Context

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Clark University

Clark University is a small liberal arts and research university, located in Worcester, Massachusetts. Clark has an undergraduate student population of about 2,300 and a graduate student population of about 1,500 (Clark University, n.d.). In the fall of 2023, Clark partnered with the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium (HEDS) to create a survey on the campus climate. In the spring of 2024, HEDS shared the results with the university. The survey findings were summarized and separated into four categories: undergraduate students, graduate students, staff and administration members, and faculty members. For this paper, I will only be using the data from the undergraduate students and their experiences, as they are the main participants in the Difficult Dialogues program.

HEDS reported that 27% of the undergraduate student body (633 students) completed the survey. While this is a rather low percentage of the undergraduate student body, the findings from the survey are still worth sharing as they provide necessary context about Clark and the experiences of its students.

The survey found that 70% of the undergraduate respondents felt satisfied with Clark's overall campus climate and 64% felt satisfied specifically with Clark's climate for diversity and inclusion. The report goes onto note that "compared to all respondents, nonbinary, African American/Black, multiracial, Hindu, sophomores, juniors, seniors, and respondents with a learning or developmental disability or psychological disorder reported greater dissatisfaction with the campus environment regarding diversity" (Clark University & Higher Education Data

Sharing Consortium, n.d.). The report additionally noted that the number of students who reported that they were satisfied with the "diversity of students has decreased from 60% in 2017 to 46% in 2023" (Clark University & Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium, n.d.). The aforementioned details are important to include as in January of 2025 the Clark University administration announced that they were dissolving their office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (J. Magee & K. Kiem, email to student body, January 13, 2025).

Furthermore, the report also highlighted the high presence of tension and dissonance among the undergraduate student body. Many respondents focused on the division between "Clarkies" -- the majority of Clarks student body who are typically more social justice oriented -- and the "Cougars," the other half of Clark students who are more closely associated with the sports teams and the management majors. Students wrote that they want the university to aid in fostering an environment and "institutional culture toward kindness, forgiveness, and being considerate of your impact on others. This suggests that programming related to developing skills for interpersonal repair may be warranted and useful to an undergraduate population navigating many complex social issues" (Clark University & Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium, n.d.).

The Difficult Dialogues Program

In April of 2005 the Ford Foundation asked for proposals for their Difficult Dialogues initiative. 675 colleges and universities from across the United States applied and 27, including Clark, were selected. Clark's participation in the initiative was mainly backed by the Higgins School of Humanities. The goal of this program was to raise awareness of and develop further skills in dialogue and strengthen the practice of it on campus among faculty, staff, and students. Each semester had a different theme. The project consisted of faculty development opportunities,

courses and seminars with a focus on dialogue, and, in coordination with the student life department, programs for Clark students as well as the public. The intention and hope of creating and fostering a culture of dialogue on campus was to expand the Clark communities' experiences of learning through and engaging with dialogue, as well as to strengthen collaboration across the community (Cytron-Walker et al., 2013).

Sometime in the teens the original Difficult Dialogues program became dormant. In the 2020-2021 school year, following the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in the summer of 2020, a group of Clark faculty, students, and staff relaunched the program as "Difficult Dialogues on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion." The program is funded by Clark's President's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Fund. Its original advisory board was composed of two students, two faculty members, and one staff member. The two faculty members, Professors Eric DeMeulenaere and Jie Park are the only two members of this original group that are still involved today. Additionally, the program had seven student fellows who helped plan and facilitate dialogue sessions; all seven of these fellows have since moved on from Clark and the difficult dialogues program.

The revitalized program's goal is to encourage community engagement through "productive conversations and mobilizing intergenerational, intergroup collectives toward a commitment to action surrounding prevalent issues on campus and in our society" (E. DeMeulenaere & J. Park, Presentation to Clark community, 2021). Further, the program aims to provide a space for the Clark community to grow their dialogic skills by engaging in dialogues about difficult topics (i.e. sexism, homophobia, racism, classism, ableism, transphobia, etc.) in a real and meaningful manner. Additionally, the program intends to build "sustainable and generative space where community members who have historically been in conflict can ask

questions and engage in intergenerational and intergroup dialogue with mutual respect, integrity, and support" (E. DeMeulenaere & J. Park, Presentation to Clark community, 2021). The DD program's final goal is to use dialogue as a means to facilitate long term collective action in the Clark community, as well as the Worcester community and global community at large.

Currently, there are six Difficult Dialogues fellows; three are juniors, two are seniors, and one is a fifth year accelerated-masters degree student. To become a fellow, students enroll in a course titled "Difficult Dialogues on Race & Racism." In this course students learn the theory behind IGD -- and other models of dialectic interaction -- and practice how to facilitate and engage in them as well. After successful completion of the course, students can choose to become a DD fellow. The DD fellows are paid a stipend for the work they do.

The structure of the current DD program is as follows: during the fall semester DD fellows, along with Professors DeMeulenaere and Park meet to conceptualize what they want the theme of their dialogue series that spring to be. The group chooses a theme to focus on by discussing campus and world events and determining the best practices of how to bring those themes to the Clark community. In the spring the group finalizes the theme and breaks it down into sessions that they will hold for the community. The fellows, as well as the faculty, choose which dialogues they want to plan and facilitate; in their chosen groups, everyone plans out their dialogue and brings it to the larger group for feedback. Throughout the semester the groups facilitate their planned dialogues, meeting occasionally to reflect on previous dialogues and continue to plan for future ones.

Methods and Methodology

For this thesis I combined three different methodological lenses, autoethnography, semi-structured interviews, and participant observer research. I chose to utilize all three of these

lenses in an effort to strengthen my argument of how influential dialogue can be to an individual and to illuminate the role of trust and vulnerability. Through my own experiences, I know that dialogue requires vulnerability, but that it can also be very rewarding. Combining my own experiences in dialogue with the DD fellows and participants' experiences allowed me to see dialogue and vulnerabilities effects on a larger range of individuals.

Further, in the Fall 2024 semester I conducted a survey about dialogue across political differences on Clark's campus. I did not end up using the data from this survey as the focus of the survey did not align with what my project became. However, from this data I learned that many Clark students feel like there is not much dialogue occurring on campus and they wish there was more.

To recruit people for the interviews I explained my project to the DD fellows during one meeting and told them that I would email them soon after the meeting with instructions of how to participate in the interviews, if they wished. I first sent one email to all the participants thanking them for their warmth and instructing them to reply to the email or text me if they wanted to be interviewed. This method did not yield many results so I then emailed all the fellows separately and followed up with them in person.

My goal for these interviews was to attempt to learn about the fellows' experiences in the DD program as well as their experiences with dialogue on Clark's campus as a whole. With Jie's help I created the following list of questions for my interviews:

- Why were you drawn to difficult dialogues?

- Are you in other spaces similar to difficult dialogues?

  - If so, how do those spaces compare?

  - If not, why not?

- What do you think the importance of a space like DD is at (a PWI like) Clark?

- What do you think is the purpose of a space like DD is at Clark? What is the space's intended audience? Are there multiple intended audiences? Are there tensions between the intended groups?

- What makes a dialogue difficult? Do you think that DD is difficult? Do you want it to be more difficult?

- What are the barriers to a really challenging dialogue? How would you dismantle those barriers?

- What do you think stops people from participating in a space like DD? What would you say in response to them?

- Some people argue that there isn't enough dialogue on Clark's campus. What would you say to that? Why do you think there isn't enough dialogue? If you think there is enough dialogue, why do you think that there are people who don't believe there is dialogue on campus?

As mentioned above, in addition to my interviews, I took notes during the DD planning sessions that I attended and compared those notes to the data from my interviews as well as the theory I was reading for this paper. I connected my notes to the interviews as such: After my first round of analysis on the interviews, I went through my notes on both the readings and planning sessions and indicated where I saw the connection between the theory I was reading and the real practice of IGD that is occuring in the DD group. Additionally, I would note where I saw inconsistencies between the theory and practice, or other moments of tension that occurred (i.e. fellows disagreeing with one another or a Clark University policy). Further, I would note

moments in interviews or literature where I found connections to my own stories and experiences with dialouge.

I also took notes during the DD dialogues that were open for the Clark community. During these dialogues I took note of how individuals interacted with the space, as well as the people in the space. I paid careful attention to who participated and how much they did. As mentioned previously, I joined the DD fellows cohort in order to gain better insight into how they plan and facilitate events. I additionally kept all handouts from those DD sessions so that I can reference them further in this paper.

Further, I have given both the participants and all the other DD fellows, (other than faculty members) pseudonyms in order to protect their anonymity. While other aspects of the fellows identities will be shared, I have elected to not share any fellows name in an effort to protect their privacy. Additionally, some of what is said in the dialogues, interviews, and planning sessions can include very personal information and details of the fellows lives; I have omitted any details that would disclose or expose the fellows real identification in any manner.

Limitations of Study

The above study has many limitations. The largest is that I was only able to interview three DD fellows. All three of those individuals had very strong biases in favor of dialogue as a method of social change and community building, so no one was complicating the narrative. Any future researcher should make an effort to interview all fellows as well as students who are not in the DD program, in order to gain a more complete understanding of Clark students perspectives on dialogue. Further, I did not directly ask any participants about their experiences, so much of their experiences has been based on my own personal interpretation and biases.

Data Analysis

Of the six fellows, three elected to be interviewed. I conducted one interview in late February of 2025 and the other two in March of the same year. At first I planned on doing traditional coding with the data; however, after spending more time with the data and learning more about the process and theory behind it, I elected to do discourse analysis instead. Discourse analysis dissects the language that people use in an effort to better understand their viewpoints and identities. Discourse analysis is grounded in the theory that people "do not just mean things with language. [They] also do things with language. [They] accomplish actions, goals, and purposes" (Gee & Handford, 2023, p. 1).

Using this theory, I printed out and analyzed the transcripts of my three interviews using the three lenses of discourse analysis (social identity, what work is done through the language, and what cultural models and figured worlds are at play). By using these lenses I aimed to discover how the participants' connections to dialogue and to the Clark community affected their perceptions of dialogue on Clark's campus. I additionally looked for the barriers[6] to dialogue that the participants identified and investigated how the various barriers were connected.

After I conducted my discourse analysis, I looked for commonalities and differences between the interviews. From there I used a white-board to draw out my thoughts in an effort to better analyze the connections between the interviews. These connections eventually became my main themes, which are further explained in my Findings section.

Further, I also went through my field notes and connected them to themes that were repeated in the interviews. I want to note that my notes as well as the themes I found through discourse analysis are most likely biased based on my own thoughts and experiences. In an effort

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[6] For this project I have defined 'barriers' as "something immaterial that impedes or separates" (Merriam-Webster, 2018).

to counteract this bias I frequently went over bits of my findings with my peers from my praxis cohort as well as friends who are not involved in CYES. Below I have included an excerpt from an interview; using this section of text I will demonstrate how I conducted discourse analysis.

> **Gabrielle[7]:** It really depends on where a person is coming from. Because like, to me, these conversations, well, we get to a certain point when I'm like, Oh, this is gonna get juicier. But like, if you're a facilitator, and you've been asking these questions and talking about them for like the past four or five weeks, or months even, actually, because we start doing these in the fall semester, or start thinking about them in the fall semester, like you already have some answers to the questions.
>
> But if you're coming into the space, and you're like learning terminology, or you've never actually thought about these things in these ways, like, I think that can make the conversation harder. But I think what makes it difficult for everybody is the goal of community and connecting with people and actually creating some sort of connection based off of people's vulnerability and how they're feeling and like digging into the parts of them that feel parts and ideas that feel intimate to them. (Interview 2/2025) (sic.)

First, I want to examine the excerpt above using the first lens of discourse analysis, social identity and positionality. Gabriella positions themselves as a DD facilitator by highlighting that the facilitators have been having similar dialogues to the ones that DD hosts as a group for "four or five weeks or months even." By emphasizing their status as a DD fellow they are indicating that the dialogues may not be as 'difficult' for them as a facilitator as they may be for the participants. Gabrielle further builds on the disconnect between facilitator and participant by

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[7] This answer was given in response to the question 'What makes a dialogue difficult? Do you think difficult dialogues are difficult? Do you think it should be more difficult, less difficult?'.

noting that people who may be new to the space and/or the terminology used in it, may have a more difficult experience than others.

The second lens of discourse analysis is examining the work that is done through the language used. As demonstrated above, part of the work that Gabrielle is using language to do is differentiating between DD participants and DD fellows. Further, Gabrielle is also using language to convey their personal goal of building community through dialogue and the value that comes from that community. When I brought this except of the interview to my praxis cohort, they pointed out that the goal that Gabrielle shares above, is their own personal goal, not the goal of everyone present. This differentiation is especially crucial as I only have interviews from three fellows, and no participants. It is impossible to know what everyones personal goals are and I cannot assume that they would all be the same.

Finally, when looking through the third lens of discourse analysis, cultural models and figured worlds, one can see that to Gabrielle, being a facilitator in DD implies that you possess knowledge that others may not. Additionally, in their cultural model, connection and community are created from vulnerability. Others in my praxis cohort pointed out that to Gabrielle, being vulnerable and sharing about one's 'personal' life is counter cultural. Further, Gabrielle believes that it is impossible to have 'difficult' dialogues without having connection and building that connection is the central shared goal of DD and its fellows; here, Gabrielle is assuming the values of the other DD fellows.

After I conducted discourse analysis on a passage of text, I would then look for moments where I could connect my own experiences through an autoethnographic lens. I would think of impactful moments in my life or strong feelings that resonated with me while reading these texts and make note of it in the margins, so I would remember when I was writing the thesis to

connect back to that moment. This process enabled me to gain a greater understanding of the interview data, the theory readings, and my own experiences as I was able to position them all in relation to each other.

Findings

From my interviews with the DD fellows and observations in the DD sessions, as well as my own personal experiences I have found that one cannot engage in a 'difficult' dialogue without vulnerability. This vulnerability is created through trust, storytelling, and the normalization of mistakes. However, vulnerability also acts as a barrier to dialogue on Clark's campus. Many students have a fear of saying the 'wrong' thing and fear that their vulnerability will enable them to be harmed. Additionally, the culture of 'cliqueness' and 'canceling' that can be found at Clark also acts as a barrier to dialogue. Below, I break down each of these aspects and demonstrate how they are interconnected.

The Importance of Trust

All interviews mentioned that they believe that lack of trust was somehow a barrier to difficult dialogue at Clark. One participant noted that believe that Clark is "segregated and [...] it's so weird. [...] Covid really created a lot of disconnect in different communities." (Interview 2/2025). Some individuals in the DD cohort viewed it as a part of DD's mission to bring these groups together, but others saw it best to not challenge the status quo. A group of fellows believed that it made more sense for the DD group to focus their sessions more towards 'Clarkies,' who may already have more knowledge about social justice spaces and me more willing to learn, than cougars may have never been in a space similar to DD. In an interview, one fellow advocated for more outreach towards cougars, highlighting that DD often does "miss a lot of people on campus who need to have their own political learning and dismantling of their own,

you know, prejudices" (Interview, 3/2025). The use of the word 'need' here highlights the fellows belief that no one is exempt from engaging in social justice work; it does not matter if you are a Clarkie or a cougar, you can always be learning and growing.

However, many fellows want DD to be a space for healing, which they believe cannot occur if they need to be educating cougars at the same time. In their interview, Maya who is a fifth-year graduate student who also identifies as queer and Black, promoted the importance of building a community within DD that crosses traditional social norms. During their interview, they reflected on that while many Clark students gain significant knowledge about community organizing and make many connections within the Clark community over their time at Clark is is often "hard to pass that down to freshmen and to keep the progress going and to have like a real sense of our current history and how we're archiving information" (Interview, 3/2025). In Maya's cultural model, having a sense of one's history can help build trust and further cultural and social progress and change.

Further, Isaac, a white cis-male and a senior DD fellow noted that when he first became a DD facilitator he "definitely felt awkward. I didn't really know everybody. I was definitely a lot more quiet, but the more I got to know everyone [...] the more I felt comfortable engaging fully" (Interview, 3/2025). Here, Isaac's awkwardness in the group can be attributed to the fact that he did not know, and therefore was unable to trust, the other fellows, as time went on, Isaac was able to build stronger relationships with his peers, enabling him to be more vulnerable in the DD space.

Isaac's experience is very common. During my first few meetings with the DD fellows, I was very hesitant to speak up and share my thoughts. I did not feel as though I was really a part of the space, so I just remained on the sidelines. Something that helped me in bening to share

more was forming relationships with the other DD facilitators; once I knew them better as people and friends, I was able to open up and be vulnerable with the group. Further, during the DD dialogues that we facilitate for the Clark community, I would often notice that people who came to them and did not know anyone, or only knew one or two people, often did not share as much as those who knew more people in the space.

In April, with the help of two other fellows, I planned and facilitated a dialogue about solidarity in 2025. In an effort to encourage more people to participate in much of this dialogue we were in small groups. However, I noticed that even in my small groups, some people were still hesitant to share their own thoughts and experiences. I elected to be vulnerable in this situation and share personal experiences and struggles I had with the topic. I also was careful not to take-up too much space in the conversation and in order to allow unsure participants to gather their thoughts.

Further, during the dialogue itself, the other facilitators and myself noted that the small group discussion took a while to really start up, but once they did they became very fruitful. We decided to prioritize the small group connections that were forming and changed the plan of our dialogue moving forward so that we would remain in small groups to encourage as much participation as possible. Something I noticed about being in DD was that the fellows were always trying to draw people in; whether the fellows were encouraging people to take more food or bring their friends to the next events, the fellows just wanted everyone present to feel safe and comfortable.

Checks-Ins, Community Norms, and Storytelling

Both the DD planning sessions and the facilitated dialogues, begin with a check-in question meant to break the ice and help facilitate the creation of trust. All present share their

name and pronouns, as well as an answer to a question. These check-ins provide a sense of community as it allows the participants to introduce themselves to each other as well as learn something about the other people present. In the facilitated sessions after the check ins, the community norms are read aloud[8]. Each participant has a copy of the community norms so that they can continue to refer back to them during and after the session.

Many of the community guidelines focus on the importance of respecting and valuing other participants' opinions. Grounding the space in respect, allows participants to more easily become comfortable with sharing their opinions. In Maya's interview they acknowledge that during the process of a dialogue people may cause harm or be uncomfortable, it is never anyone's "intention to make each other uncomfortable or to hurt each other" (Interview 3/2025). Maya's acknowledgment here is important as many people, myself included, do not wish to cause harm to others in the space, but may have trouble articulating what they fully desire to say.

Further, many students at Clark claim that there is a "cancel culture" among the student body, which contributes to students' hesitation and fear of engaging in open dialogue. The DD community agreements encourage all students to listen to everyone's point of view in order to gain better understanding of their lived experiences. As Maya has spent the last five years at Clark, they understand that the culture here can be very cliquey; the inclusive and understanding view they offer here of DD is a counter-narrative to the rest of Clark's culture.

Additionally, part of Maya's model of vulnerability is that it often originates from a "deep place of love" (Interview, 3/2025). As Maya is the oldest of the fellows, they hold a lot of social capital in the space; Maya is constantly reminding the fellows and anyone that enters into the DD space about the importance of love. In their interview -- and in many other DD settings-- Maya stated that to them, the community agreements of open mindedness and discovery mean

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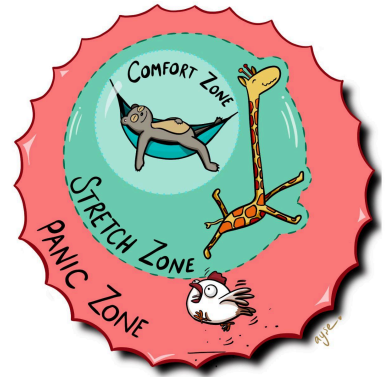
[8] See appendix for community norms

that people cannot "just ignore like the natural human humanness of like what love looks like, right? Our last series was about love because so much of what we're doing requires a lot of love" (Interview, 3/2025). Maya's cultural model of DD and relationships is very similar to Buber and Freire's. All three posit that "love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. (Freire, 1968/2014, p. 89). DD's check-in questions and community norms aid in the creation of this love, which leads to stronger relationships.

Further, the guidelines encourage all participants to question their own thinking and assumptions. The DD model acknowledges that the participants and fellows are constantly learning, growing, and having new experiences that may shape them and change their thinking and opinions. The DD framework also places a large emphasis on storytelling. When storytelling is occurring all fellows are sure to encourage participants who seem unsure of what to say. Often a fellow will model storytelling by sharing first in the small group; modeling allows the participant to feel more comfortable in the space, as they would not be the only person being vulnerable.

Storytelling helps build community and vulnerability in the DD sessions as it shows that all participants have a connection to the topic in some form. It additionally helps foster connection between participants as they may have something in common with another participant. Additionally, storytelling helps bring abstract concepts like solidarity into tangible actions that the fellows and participants can discuss. Through storytelling facilitators and participants share the space and create community. Freire (1968/2014) notes that dialogue is an "act of creation" (p.89). Dialogue utilizes structures like check-ins, community guidelines, and storytelling to aid in this community building.

Fears Associated With Dialogue

Many Clark students see engaging in dialogue as an anxiety inducing experience. Figure 1 (Image by Ayşe Gökçe Bor) depicts three zones that people may inhibit when engaging in dialectic relations. In the first zone, 'the comfort zone', people feel safe and comfortable; their beliefs are not being challenged. In the stretch zone peoples beliefs may be challenged, but they still feel relatively safe and no harm is being caused to any participants. In the panic zone, people are feeling high levels of anxiety; oftentimes core ideologies are being challenged. Most Clark students, including myself, mostly choose to remain in the comfort zone, as being in the stretch zone requires extra labor and energy that we do not want to give to dialogue. Below, I unpack how uncomfort and the fear of causing harm act as barriers to difficult dialogues on Clark's campus.

Discomfort

As mentioned above, many Clark students do not have the energy to leave their comfort zone. In their interview, Maya noted that often in academia "everybody's kind of in the like little rat race of trying to graduate and trying to just take care of themselves. And I think in that self-care, people get burnt out" (Interview, 3/2025). Maya's view of the Clark community highlights the academic burn-out they have seen over their years here; they have noticed that as people barely have the energy to take care of themselves, they may not have the energy to engage in difficult dialogues. Thus, according to Maya's cultural model, academia inhibits difficult dialogues.

Gabrielle, another DD fellow who is a senior and identifies as Black and queer, also recognizes the Clark's student body's lack of "time and energy" (Interview, 2/2025). Both

Gabrielle and Maya recognize the time and energy it takes to move from one's comfort zone to one's growth zone; further, they recognize that this can be an uncomfortable and hard process. Maya also states that many Clark students believe that they can avoid the discomfort that comes from engaging in dialogue because they "had, like, a class about slavery [or…] watched some Jubilee videos, you know?" (Interview, 3/2025). Maya notes that there is a "hyperconsumption of culture and politics and art in a way that's distorted. It's not rooted in the physical and what's happening, like, with our friends and with our neighbors and our family first" (Interview, 3/2025). In the previous statements Maya is highlighting a dissonance that is occurring within the Clark community; more people are comfortable engaging with discourse in online spaces than in-person spaces.

Many Clark students find it easier to engage with people in settings like classrooms or on the internet, as it could feel like the stakes are lower than when two people are engaging in person. Further, many students have remarked that Clark is often a "bit cliquey" (Clark University & Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium, n.d.). This cliqueness is often attributed to the fact that Clark has such a small student body, meaning that everyone knows each other and does not really have to go out of their own way to make friends. However Gabriele notes that DD has provided them with opportunities to "make community with other people who might align with my different identities a bit more in terms of like race and even like sexual or even gender expression" (Interview, 2/2025). Here, Gabrielle is highlighting that though it may be uncomfortable to engage in dialogue, the relationships that it creates are rewarding as they cross traditional social norms.

It is imperative for Clark students to step into their stretch zones and engage in dialogues that may be challenging to them. Though these students often feel burnt out, Maya notes that it is

"literally our job [to engage in meaningful dialogue]. We have no other option [... I]t's our collaboration that keeps us moving and alive" (Interview, 3/2025). The community that is built through engaging in uncomfortable dialogues helps students especially challenge their conventions of what activism and community should look like, in order to build greater solidarity among all people.

Causing Harm

Many people also avoid engaging in difficult dialogues because they fear that they will do harm to others or have harm done to them. This fear acts as a barrier to dialogue, as many Clark students will not willingly place themselves in a position where someone could "take that vulnerability and like... Cause a lot of harm in that moment, like you're leaving yourself especially open, and that's really difficult to get over (Interview, 3/2025). This quote, emphasizes the crux of many Clark students' fears, that if they let their guard down they will be subject to harm.

Further, many students, especially white Clarkies, do not just fear harm that will be done to them, but harm that they may cause. Isaac states that "guilt can be a huge barrier to difficult dialogues" (Interview, 3/2025). I want to mention here that Isaac said the word "guilt" seven times in his interview, while Gabrielle and Maya did not mention the topic once; this is an important note to make as Isaac is a white male and Gabrielle and Maya are both queer and Black. The dissonance here is important to note as it reflects emotional labor dynamics that are common in many activist spaces. Kelly et al. (2022) found that many challenges that occur in IGD are unique to its need for emotional labor, which can place more stress on people of marginalized experiences. Therefore, Maya and Gabrielle's experiences in IGD are not based in guilt, like Isaac's is, but rather in emotional labor.

Maya acknowledges that many people who attend a Difficult Dialogues session may experience some form of white guilt. When asked about what makes a dialogue 'difficult' or 'uncomfortable' Maya notes that among their white peers there is a "fear of being shamed, or there's fear of not saying the right thing or messing up or hurting somebody" (Interview, 3/2025). Though Maya is Black, they recognize that their white-peers may be afraid of making a mistake. They acknowledge that "it's going to be difficult, you're probably going to say something racist because we're socialized in a racist culture, it's not your fault" (Interview, 3/2025). Through this quote, Maya is attempting to quell white Clarkies guilt and fear of the DD space, telling them that it is okay to make mistakes and that everyone is growing through the work.

A tension that often arises within the group of fellows is the desire to have DD exist as a space for healing and processing or for it to function as an introduction of sorts for people who may have less knowledge about social justice issues. Isaac notes that the group often debates if they want to "invite people we know who are going to cause harm" (Interview 3/2025). Here, Isaac is displaying the other side to the harm and guilt that he previously discussed; this quote shows that many Clarkies do not wish to engage with Cougars, or others who have different beliefs than them because of a fear of harm. This disconnect between what the goal of DD is can also be seen in much of the literature about IGD. Cytron-Walker et al. (2013) noting that "participants from less-privileged social groups may be disturbed by the limited knowledge that privileged group members have about particular forms of oppression" (Cytron-Walker et al., 2013, p. 13).

The vulnerability that dialogue requires is hard and the facilitators know that. The difficulty of the dialogue is often a contributing factor to its importance. If people never engaged in difficult and meaningful dialogue that questioned the status quo, then nothing would change.

Buber defines *love* as "the responsibility of an I for a You" (Buber & Kaufmann, 1970, p. 66). Being in relational dialogue with another requires love and vulnerability from all involved. When we are in community with each other we are exposing ourselves to harm that we may not otherwise face; however, we place ourselves in each other's hands nonetheless, and recognizing that risk is crucial to understanding why people elect not to partake in dialogue at Clark.

Discussion of Findings

The above findings highlight the crucial role that vulnerability plays in dialogue; they show how vulnerability can help in building community and the importance of establishing a trusting relationship. Additionally, they show how often times, achieving that vulnerability can be a barrier in and of itself. Many college students are hesitant to be vulnerable with people they do not know. The DD fellows recognize the importance and value of vulnerability, which is why all sessions begin with and center activities designed to build trust and forge common ground between participants.

When I first joined the DD fellows group, I was very scared and hesitant to open up and participate in our planning sessions. I felt that, since everyone in the group had been there longer than me, they knew more than me, and I did not have anything productive or smart to contribute to the larger group. However, after I spent more time with the group and became better friends with all the fellows, I felt more comfortable opening up. Additionally, during our planning sessions, many of them shared their own personal stories about why they feel connected to dialogue. I found that it was not as scary to be vulnerable because those around me were doing it as well.

Knowing that vulnerability is important does not make practicing it any easier. Many times in our planning or feedback sessions the fellows and I discussed how we wanted people to

just open up and be comfortable with the space, but that was much easier said than done. We often planned our sessions so that as many people would be comfortable participating as possible, but we could not always control what occurred.

Oftentimes another tool to help foster vulnerability was time; during a dialogue that I facilitated, as people spent more time in the space and with the fellows, they grew more comfortable and found it easier to participate. Many participants appreciated that the DD session started with a few minutes to eat the food provided and chat, rather than delve right into the topic. The extra time allotted for even more community and trust building. Though many participants were possibly still afraid of saying the wrong thing, as time went on more and more joined the conversation and formed relationships with the others in their small groups.

Vulnerability is difficult. It is hard to put one's ego aside and share your deepest thoughts. However, because vulnerability is so difficult is what makes it so rewarding. So often today, we choose the easier option. We order food delivery on our phone instead of cooking for ourselves or we post on social media rather than having a real conversation with someone. Dialogue urges us to go outside of our comfort zones and build connections with the community around us; vulnerable dialogue may be challenging, but the relationships it can create help sustain us and our social movements.

Implications and Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Theoretical Implications

The findings above demonstrate the need for vulnerability in dialogue. They show how vulnerable and open dialogue can help build community across social divides which can create social change. While past studies have shown the need for vulnerability in dialogue, none have shown how it can aid in coalitions for social change. Furthermore, the findings above highlight

many Clark students' fear of vulnerability, and how this fear contributes to the social divides that exist on campus.

As shown in literature, vulnerability continues to be a large factor in what makes an IGD 'successful'; the above finding highlight various barriers to vulnerability such as students self segregating into their own groups, guilt and anxiety over saying the 'wrong' thing, and a sense of comfort in retaining the status quo. The findings demonstrate the need to continue to focus on vulnerability and relationship forming when facilitating IGDs, especially on university campuses.

Many of the studies about IGD on college campuses are conducted on college campuses that are over double the size of Clark. The University of Michigan, where IGD was first created, has over 52,000 students. It is difficult to compare what is occurring at Clark to these much larger institutions. At a larger institution it is easier to maintain anonymity and therefore share vulnerable details about yourself; the school is so big it is unlikely that you will ever see a person again. However, as Clark is so small, there is often a feeling that everyone knows each other. This feeling can inhibit vulnerability as people feel like they are always with people they know in some form.

When you are engaging in a dialogue in a room full of strangers at your 50,000 person university, it is easier to be vulnerable as there is a lower chance you will ever see those people again outside of that specific setting. But at Clark, there is a much higher likelihood of seeing that person again. Many times I have met someone for the first time, and it turns out that they were classmates of my roommate, or another similar situation. Further, even when I go out into the Worcester community, I often see people that I know from Clark. The Clark bubble is small, but it is strong and near impossible to escape.

Further, much of the theory and studies around and about IGD have the dialogues occurring as part of a larger course that students must enroll in, whereas at Clark DD sessions are open to everyone. Both models have strengths and weaknesses. A strength of the course model is that it helps in creating an overarching structure for the dialogues as well as ensures that there will always be a certain amount of people at each session. Further, the course model connects back to Allport's (1954) "conditions for positive intergroup contact—equal status, acquaintance potential, and interdependency" as it can almost always set the exact number of participants and their identities.

A strength of an open model, like the one that DD employs is that it allows for all who wish to attend a dialogue to attend. There is no cut off limit so all who are interested may attend. Opening the dialogue to as many people as possible allows for more possibilities of people forming relationships across traditional social boundaries. Further, as Clark is a very small institution the course model may not work as well here as it would on larger campuses. For IGD courses, students apply and are selected from a larger pool of applicants based on their applications and other experiences. However, since Clark is a smaller institution the pool of applicants is already far smaller than it would be at a larger institution. Thus, it makes the most sense for Clark and the DD program to continue with their current model of dialogues.

Advice for the Difficult Dialogues Program

As stated above, it makes the most sense for the DD program to continue hosting open dialogues for the Clark community, as a course model would limit the amount of participants. The open model allows for people who are unsure about committing to a whole semester of dialogue to try one session in order to determine their feelings on the experience. Additionally, as shown in findings, the facilitators are keenly aware that, while vulnerability is crucial to

dialogue, it does not come by easily and they make very purposeful efforts to encourage vulnerability in all participants.

People who are new to the DD space enjoy the time at the beginning of each session that is spent conversing with peers and eating the provided free food. Some have found that this time cna be awkward, especially if a participant does not know anyone else in the space, so facilitators should be sure to look for people who may seem nervous during this unstructured time. Further, the introduction and check-in questions at the beginning of each session helped those who were nervous become more comfortable in the space and further familiarize themselves with the fellows.

Though facilitating DD can be challenging, it is a vital program to Clarks campus. The DD program helps break down traditional social barriers and allows students to form relationships across traditional social cliques. Moving forwards, I would urge the DD program to continue to and prioritize reaching out to groups, such as cougars, who may not be as likely to attend a DD session. As Clark is such a small school, it is possible that a fellow is likely connected to a student who feels very hesitant and anxious about attending a dialogue session. That fellow should encourage their peers to attend the session by telling them that there will be food and highlighting the importance of engaging in dialogue on university campuses at this moment in history; the fellows should also highlight the role that vulnerability plays in building solidarity. We students cannot fully support each other if we do not fully understand each other, so we must engage in vulnerability to form connections.

Further, during many planning and feedback sessions the time and length of DD sessions were discussed. This past semester, both dialogues for Clark students occurred during the Thursday 'common time'. However, many fellows and participants remarked that the

hour-and-fifteen minute sessions that occurred during this period were not long enough and many were not able to attend due to prior commitments. In the future, I recommend that DD hold their sessions at varying times so that more individuals who wish to attend can. Having the sessions during varying times would also possibly allow for the potential of the dialogues being longer, which many of the fellow remarked that they would appreciate.

The Dilemma of Free Speech on College Campuses

The topic of free speech on college campuses is one that I have been wrestling with for a while, and has only grown more complicated as time has gone on. Currently, United States President Donald Trump is threatening to withhold federal funds from several universities on the grounds of "combat[ing] anti-semitism" (Blinder, 2025), which can often be taken to mean any pro-Palistinian or leftist organizing. A list of changes that Harvard University was ordered to make -- and refused to comply with -- included "a variety of conservative complaints with academia, including a lack of diverse political viewpoints among faculty members and a disdain for diversity, equity and inclusion programs" (Blinder, 2025). The right-wing attack on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts is not new, but it is threatening any dialogue that could take place on a university campus.

Further, conservative college students, both at Clark and other liberal leaning universities have felt "shunned for expressing certain beliefs at institutions of higher learning, even before the current Trump administration" (Haney, 2025). One Clark student notes that "Clark has a very progressive community which comes with great acceptance of diverse people; the issue, however, comes with extreme intolerance and alienation of those who disagree with progressive views" (Clark University & Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium, n.d.). Many left-leaning

students, especially those who hold marginalized identities, support free speech, but do not want to engage with others who will invalidate their identity and experiences.

Many academics see it as the universities role to encourage students to leave their 'safe-zones' and enter their 'growth zones'. Two dilemmas arise from this responsibility; the first is that many students are not accustomed to leaving their comfort zones and therefore will be very hesitant to do so. Secondly, there is no set definition of what any of these zones look like as each individual person has different levels of comfortability with different topics.

Many scholars argue "that sensitive issues such as race, sexuality and war are beyond reasonable discussion or that debates on these issues might lead to offensive speech that violates the dignity of the members of vulnerable groups" (Leiviskä, 2020). However, others believe that "academic discourse is meant to be free from ideological constraints—this is part of what academic freedom is there to ensure" (Simpson, 2020, p. 289).

My dilemma with free speech is as follows: if we want people to be honest and vulnerable, then we cannot be policing what people say. But, vulnerability and growth in dialogue can only occur when the individuals present feel safe, supported, and comfortable. If people in the space are not practicing tolerance towards the basic existence and identities of others, then real dialogue cannot occur. Further, there are

> two limits associated with the notion of toleration: the first limit is reached with views that are not agreed with but nevertheless tolerated because of the respect for the equal rights of those presenting these views. The other, absolute and final limit of toleration is reached with views that simply cannot be tolerated because they violate the criteria of reciprocity and generality inherent in the respect conception (Leiviskä, 2020, p.1174).

Thus, as stated above "dialogue cannot occur between those… who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them" (Freire, 1968/2014, p. 88). When it comes to dialogue on university campuses, there must be parameters in place that protect people with marginalized identities and allow for opportunities for as many people as possible to enter their growth zones. Though having such parameters and confines are often seen as antithetical to free speech, they are necessary for meaningful dialogues.

I have spent much of the past year and a half speaking with friends I have at colleges across the country discussing what is occurring with free-speech on our campuses. We often talk about how we feel like no one speaks their mind anymore, how no one wants to be friends with people that disagree with them. But we are also a part of the problem. Many times one of us has been in class in which a professor or another student will say something that we disagree with, but we will not say anything about it.

Like dialogue, engaging in free speech requires trust and it is that trust that is so lacking in our current cultural moment. Students are afraid of speaking out because there is no trust between students and their college administrations. Time and time again in my conversations with friends we remark upon how we feel like our university administrators do not care about us as people and that they are just squeezing every last penny out of us. Many administrators, including the ones at Clark, would claim that this sentiment is not the truth. However, now more than ever actions about free speech on campus speak louder than words; administrators must show their support for their students and free speech through concrete actions.

Learning and Growing

bell hooks wrote that "the moment we choose to love we begin to move against domination, against oppression. The moment we choose to love we begin to move towards

freedom, to act in ways that liberate ourselves and others" (hooks, 1994a). For me, engaging in dialogue is an act of self-love and an act of love for and towards my community. It is recognizing that we are all on a journey of growth together, even if we are all in different places and moving at different paces.

Many times throughout this project I wondered if the work I was doing had a point, or if it was all just to inflate my own ego. From the beginning of my CYES journey I was told that the whole point of the praxis project was to change our community, but it felt like I was not changing anything. I watched and admired my classmates' projects, jealous of the fact that they were 'actually' doing praxis and my project was pointless. In the fall of this academic year, I received a letter that I had written in middle school my future self saying, "I don't [sic.] know what you are up to right now, but I hope you're changing the world." I cried when I opened this letter; feeling like I had let my past self down. I wanted to just give up on praxis entirely.

However, I now understand a few things that my past self did not; things I could not learn unless I had gone through this whole process. I learned that the point of both praxis and dialogue is not to change the world, but to change yourself, and that change is more than enough. Dialogue, unlike debate or discussion, is not about the outcome, but the journey that one takes to arrive there. It is about sitting with other people you care about (and even people you don't know) and trusting that you can be open and vulnerable and how the relationship grows and changes from doing such.

At the beginning of this thesis, I wrote about how I used to constantly worry about if I was a good person and whether or not I was 'enough,' even though I did not know what those two things looked like. Now, I still worry about being a good person and whether or not I am doing 'enough' but I also understand that there is no goal post I will hit that will inform me when

I am 'done.' The only thing I am sure of now is that I am trying my best and that I am learning and growing everyday, and maybe that is enough.

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Appendix

Community Agreements

- **Open-mindedness:** Listen to and respect all points of view
- **Acceptance:** Suspend judgment as best you can
- **Curiosity:** Seek to understand rather than persuade
- **Discovery:** Question old assumptions, look for new insights
- **Sincerity:** Speak for yourself about what has personal heart and meaning
- **Brevity:** Go for honesty and depth, but don't go on and on

- **Share Space:** Ensure all voices are heard

Copy of Difficult Dialogues Community Agreements

Ego Listening	Mindful Listening
Concerned with your own inner voice	Attention is directed entirely to speaker
Thinking about your own response and/or interjecting your own stories or opinions.	Turn down own internal voice and not be concerned with your own opinion
Directs spotlight back onto yourself	Directs spotlight onto the storyteller
• Interpretation: "From your story it sounds like you were actually depressed." • Telling Your Own Story: "That reminds me of..." • Asking Curiosity Questions: "So how old was your mom when she had you?" • Opinions/Judgements/Advice: "I don't think you should share that." • One-Upping: "You think that's bad, listen to what happened to ME!" • One-Downing: "I can't even IMAGINE going through something like that."	Engaging with the storyteller's story: • **With gratitude** for the gift of the story ("Thank you for..."); • **With appreciation** for learning a new perspective ("I appreciate that you made me think differently about..."; • **With acknowledgment** for the courage it takes to be vulnerable ("I witnessed how difficult it was for you to share...")

Internal (Ego) Listening	Mindful Listening
Listen to your own inner voice	Attention is directed entirely to speaker
Thinking about your own response and/or interjecting your own stories or opinions.	Turn off own internal voice and not be concerned with your own opinion
• Making Meaning AKA Interpretation - "From your story it sounds like you were actually depressed" • Telling Your Own Story - "That reminds me of,..." • Asking Questions - "So how old was your mom when she had you?" • Opinions/Judgements/Advice - "I don't think you should share that!" • One-Upping - "You think that's bad, listen to what happened to ME!" • One-Downing - "I can't even IMAGINE going through something like that!"	• I was there with you when you said.... (this is more than, "I hear you") • I felt this in my body when you said • I was able to think about X differently while listening • It struck me how you were able to X • One word that captures what I heard is X • I feel gratitude for your story because.... • _____ really resonated with me because ....

Ego Listening	Mindful Listening
Concerned with your own inner voice	Attention is directed entirely to speaker
Thinking about your own response and/or interjecting your own stories or opinions.	Turn down own internal voice and not be concerned with your own opinion
Directs spotlight back onto yourself	Directs spotlight onto the storyteller
• Interpretation: "From your story it sounds like you were actually depressed." • Telling Your Own Story: "That reminds me of..." • Asking Curiosity Questions: "So how old was your mom when she had you?" • Opinions/Judgements/Advice: "I don't think you should share that." • One-Upping: "You think that's bad, listen to what happened to ME!" • One-Downing: "I can't even IMAGINE going through something like that."	Engaging with the storyteller's story: • **With gratitude** for the gift of the story ("Thank you for..."); • **With appreciation** for learning a new perspective ("I appreciate that you made me think differently about..."; • **With acknowledgment** for the courage it takes to be vulnerable ("I witnessed how difficult it was for you to share...")

Copy of a worksheet about listening provided at a DD session

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What We're Doing Requires Love 64

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Difficult Dialogue – Facilitation #1

Goals: Story-telling, introducing the series

1. Welcome and Introducing DD –mission/vision (5 minutes)
   - Leyla is drafting this section
2. Introductions (facilitators & participants?) (10 minutes)
   - Name, pronouns, check in
3. Land Acknowledgement (3 minutes)
   - We will use the one we have been using in the past
4. Community Agreements (5 minutes)
   - Provide sheet of paper that includes agreements, if people find an agreement important to them, then we can add that
5. Opening Activity (15 minutes)
   - Dialogic listening
     - Prompt: a moment that brought you joy this week?
6. What does it mean to be me in 2025? (25 minutes)
   - Affinity groups (race-based, see who's in the room: Asian, Black, Latina/e/o, multiracial people?)
   - Color, symbol, image (give everyone 5-7 minutes before sharing)
   - Share out (20 min), if not enough, can shave more time
7. Whole-group Discussion (25 minutes)
   - Every group goes around and share two words that represents what was a recurring theme/feeling in the affinity spaces (i.e. worry, anger, hopelessness, etc.), build from those words
   - How much of it was me? How much was shared amongst participants in affinity groups? How many similarities and differences in affinity groups?
8. Closing – Reflection
   -

Outline of a Difficult Dialogues session from this past semester