FROM ANTAGONISM TO AGONISM IN IDENTITY-BASED CONFLICT:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE BRIDGING THE RELIGIOUS DIVIDE
DIALOGUE PROJECT IN SALT LAKE CITY

by

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ABSTRACT

An increasing number of conflicts in the world today are driven – at least in part – by the disputants' identification with worldviews or moral orders that are incommensurate. Many of these conflicts are exacerbated by disputants’ further identification with unmourned trauma, trauma that has compelled disputants to “turn away” from or “foreclose” the other. Arguing that traditional conflict resolution strategies often fail to help – or may even exacerbate – these conflict situations, this paper seeks to answer the question: How can discourse be imagined, structured and practiced so that it: (1) fosters agonistic rather than antagonistic relationships between individuals and groups who identify with divergent worldviews; and (2) encourages disputants to move beyond identification with past trauma and unfold the “foreclosure” of others they feel have harmed them. Based on the analysis of a dialogue project described by many participants as transformative, this paper suggests four discursive strategies: interactive approach, dialogic structure, affective ambiance, and narrative focus.

This paper first describes a divisive dispute in Salt Lake City, Utah, that emerged in response to the city’s decision to sell a block of Main Street to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. After analyzing the religious divide between Mormon and non-Mormon residents of the city that underlies that dispute, it then analyzes two public processes initiated to address the conflict. This paper argues that the initial public hearing processes exacerbated antagonisms in the city, while the Bridging the Religious
Divide dialogue project helped to heal relationships. Finally, the paper describes how four discursive strategies helped to transform antagonistic relationships into agonistic ones, and helped participants to heal past trauma and turn back to their ideals of community and to each other.
TO

Zoey, who started me on this path.

Bill, who is willing to travel it with me.

My professors for teaching me new ways of listening and thinking.

All the participants in the Bridging the Religious Divide dialogue project

who are true pioneers in the creation of community.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This paper takes up the question of how to work with identity-based conflict. More specifically, it explores what discursive strategies can help address conflict driven by identification with incommensurate “worldviews” or “moral orders,” as well as by identification with subject positions defined – at least in part – by identification with past trauma and the “turning away” or “foreclosure” of an other.

Conflict involving incommensurate worldviews is characterized by a disjuncture in the way individuals and groups understand and make sense of the world and thus, how they live out their fundamental beliefs or “moral orders.” As a result of this disjuncture, individuals and groups engaged in such conflict often feel dismissed, devalued or denigrated by the other, or even experience the other as threatening their very existence.

Conflicts driven by identification with divergent worldviews are often exacerbated by the disputants further identification with trauma that has been (or is perceived to have been) suffered at the hands of an other. Individuals and groups can be considered to have taken up an identity defined (at least in part) by identification with trauma when they “internalize” a painful event – perhaps because the pain and loss connected to the event are too great to mourn – and “turn away” from the other perceived to have caused them pain. This paper argues that traditional conflict resolution strategies that emphasize finding mutually acceptable/beneficial solutions through rational processes involving
compromise or consensus often backfire in conflict situations involving identity-based issues. In the case of conflicts involving incommensurate worldviews, this is because disputants lack a common framework for shared understanding. As a result, efforts to reason across differences often leave both sides feeling misunderstood, dismissed, or even repudiated. Perhaps more important, it is also because disputants may experience traditional conflict resolution strategies as asking them to give up (or substantially compromise) the beliefs and values that define their identity.

In the case of conflicts involving identification with trauma and foreclosure of an other, traditional conflict resolution strategies often fail because the emphasis on rationality does not provide opportunity to unfold – and mourn – the underlying emotional experiences that define (in part) the disputants’ identities. As a result, disputants are likely to interpret and respond to current events through the psychic template created by the original trauma and simply re-enact the roles of victim and victimizer.

In response to such problems, some scholars are calling for new approaches to working with conflict. At the heart of their thinking is the view that difference and conflict are ineradicable, and thus strategies for working with conflict need to focus more on how to live with difference in an “agonistic” way than on how to resolve it. In addition, there is growing recognition that the experience of trauma plays a critical role in how individuals and groups experience future events and relate to “the other.” Thus, there is advocacy for strategies that create space for the affective, and allow individuals and groups to open up past hurts and begin unfolding their foreclosure of “the other.”
What these approaches look like in practice, however, is largely undefined. Thus the question driving this research project focuses primarily on praxis:

*How can discourse be imagined, structured and practiced so that it: (1) fosters agonistic rather than antagonistic relationships between individuals and groups who identify with divergent worldviews; and (2) encourages disputants to move beyond identification with past trauma and unfold the “foreclosure” of others they feel have harmed them.*

This paper seeks to answer that question by analyzing a dialogue project in Salt Lake City, Utah, that many participants described as “transformative.” The project emerged in response to a divisive dispute over the city’s decision to sell a block of Main Street to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) and the church’s subsequent regulation of speech, conduct and dress on the plaza it constructed. The dispute polarized the city, re-energizing and deepening a long-simmering community fault line between members of the LDS Church, or Mormons, and residents who are not members of the LDS Church, or non-Mormons.

In an effort to resolve the conflict, the city initially conducted a relatively traditional process of public hearings and meetings in 2002-2003 which focused primarily on the disposition of the plaza. Later, in response to the contention and divisiveness that was still simmering, the city originated the Bridging the Religious Divide project, an innovative initiative involving public forums and small dialogue groups that took place over 2004-2005.

This paper first analyzes the religious divide between Mormons and non-Mormons in Salt Lake City. It argues that the divide is best understood as an identity-
driven conflict, that is, a clash between people who identify with incommensurate worldviews or moral orders. It also argues that the divide is perpetuated by identification with unmourned trauma, an identification that causes people to turn away from or foreclose “the other.”

This paper then analyzes the two public processes initiated to address the Main Street Plaza dispute. It argues that the initial public hearing processes exacerbated antagonisms in Salt Lake City. In contrast, it contends that for many of the participants, the dialogue project transformed antagonistic relationships into agonistic ones, helping them to heal past trauma and turn back to their ideals of community and to each other.

This paper identifies four discursive strategies that appear to have played an important role: interactive approach, dialogic structure, affective ambiance and narrative focus.

Chapter 2 describes the dispute over the Main Street Plaza as well as the public hearings implemented by Salt Lake City to address that dispute. It also describes the Bridging the Religious Divide project, especially the small group dialogue initiative. Chapter 3 provides a description of the methodologies utilized in this research project. Chapter 4 presents a theoretical framework for understanding the Main Street Plaza dispute and religious divide that underlies that dispute. This chapter begins with a discussion of identity and the relationship between identity and conflict. It then outlines the thinking of several key communication and conflict theorists on “worldview” or “moral” conflict. Finally, it provides a brief theoretical discussion of the relationship between trauma and conflict. Chapter 5 provides an analysis of the religious divide between Mormon and non-Mormon residents in Salt Lake City as a conflict driven by identity. Chapter 6 briefly summarizes some of the key assumptions at work in many
traditional approaches to conflict resolution and explains why these traditional strategies tend to fail in conflicts driven by identity. This chapter also briefly outlines some emerging theoretical perspectives on how to work with conflict driven by identity and morality-based issues. Chapter 7 analyzes why the public hearing process initiated by Salt Lake City to address the Main Street Plaza dispute failed to ameliorate, and at least for some, exacerbated the public antagonism evoked by that dispute. Chapter 8 analyzes why the Bridging the Religious Divide small group dialogue initiative, in contrast to the public hearing process, increased agonism among Salt Lake City residents. In response to the research questions posed by this paper, this chapter identifies four discursive strategies that appear to have played an important role in the transformative nature of the dialogue groups: interactive approach, dialogic structure, affective ambiance, and narrative focus. Chapter 9 provides a conclusion.
CHAPTER 2

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MAIN STREET PLAZA DISPUTE
AND THE BRIDGING THE RELIGIOUS DIVIDE
SMALL GROUP DIALOGUE INITIATIVE

In the heart of downtown Salt Lake City, the castle-like spires of the Mormon Temple thrust skyward, piercing the heavens. Surrounding the temple, but walled off from the city streets, lie the luxuriously landscaped temple grounds, bursting with the brilliant blooms of multitudinous flowers in summer and shimmering with a million small Christmas tree lights in winter. Known as Temple Square, this area has been the spiritual center for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) since it was completed in 1893. Annually, millions of church members from around the world visit it in droves, and daily, scores of devotees enact sacred rituals and take solemn vows within its confines.

Just to the east, on another block of land, stands the world headquarters of the LDS Church. Here, surrounded by a cluster of historic granite buildings housing various church functions, the monolithic frame of the LDS Church office building towers over the north end of downtown Salt Lake City. Its sheer sides stand in sharp contrast to the ornate architecture of the Salt Lake Temple and its monumental size dwarfs the surrounding structures. From this building, the LDS Church administers its global ecclesiastical operations, including a growing membership of more than 12 million.
Historically, the double lanes of Salt Lake City’s Main Street sliced through this complex of church structures, providing an open corridor for the passage of vehicles and pedestrians and linking Utah’s state capital, which lies on a knoll three blocks to the north, to the commercial center of downtown Salt Lake City. In 1999, however, Salt Lake City sold the block of Main Street lying between Temple Square and the church administrative buildings to the LDS Church, retaining an easement for public pedestrian access. Subsequently, the LDS Church closed the street to vehicle traffic and converted it into an elegantly landscaped plaza. What was once a public piece of Main Street in Salt Lake City became a private piece of property for the LDS Church, one which linked its sacred temple grounds to its administrative offices.

The sale, and the series of actions that followed it – including a successful lawsuit challenging restrictions imposed on speech, dress and behavior on the newly constructed plaza – set off a deeply contentious dispute in Salt Lake City. This dispute, which unfolded in a series of events stretching over 5 years, revealed a deep divide in the city – a divide that most residents try to ignore most of the time and hesitate to acknowledge publicly, but that many residents experience –and suffer from – on a day-to-day basis. It is a divide that shapes the city’s religious, emotional, social, political and even physical landscape. It is the divide between residents of the city who are members of the LDS Church, or Mormons, and residents who are not members of that Church, or non-Mormons.

In a special report published in October 2001, the Salt Lake Tribune named the chasm between the city’s Mormon and non-Mormon populations “the unspoken divide.” The paper reported that 86% of non-Mormons and 63% of Mormons said they experience
a social, political and cultural divide between the two groups ("3-in-5 Utahns See Divide," 2001). Perhaps more significantly, the Tribune reported that 70% of non-Mormons said they felt the situation was deteriorating, or at least, not improving ("3-in-5 Utahns See Divide," 2001). In the stories that accompanied the paper’s report, residents on both sides of the divide described painful experiences where they felt judged, stereotyped, excluded, isolated and marginalized because of their religious affiliation, or lack thereof. Repeatedly, residents expressed strong feelings of resentment, anger and bitterness.

The Salt Lake Tribune editorialized:

The social divide between Mormons and non-Mormons is the elephant in Utah’s living room. Everyone can see it, but most people are reluctant to talk about it openly with people on the other side. So the communication between camps often takes indirect forms: fractious letters to the editor, political battles over liquor regulation or income tax-exemptions for dependent children, academic clashes over LDS Church history. ("The Great Divide," 2001)

The dispute over the Main Street Plaza opened up this “social divide,” bringing the elephant to life. Perhaps because of its physicality, the fate of Main Street became a symbol for many Mormons and non-Mormons of their own experience – and perhaps their future – in Salt Lake City. For some, the LDS Church’s construction of an elegant plaza on a block of Main Street demonstrated – again – how the church and its members generously contribute to and improve the community, benevolently extending a hand of welcome to everyone, and yet are criticized and even attacked by those who resent Mormons. For others, the church’s acquisition of a block of Main Street and its imposition of behavioral restrictions on the plaza it constructed was yet another egregious example of how the LDS Church and its members dominate decisions in the city, and
repeatedly exclude and marginalize non-Mormons in their own community. The Washington Post, for example, writing during the heat of the Main Street Plaza dispute in December 2002, described the situation as follows:

Ever since Brigham Young reached the shores of a slate-gray lake beneath the Wasatch peaks and declared “This is the right place,” the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been the dominant force – spiritual, political and financial – in this handsome city. And ever since Young’s arrival in 1847, the church’s power has sparked resentment here among the “gentiles,” the Mormons’ term for those who don’t follow their faith.

But this fall those sparks erupted into a bonfire of civic rage, splitting the populace bitterly along religious lines. “This is the most difficult period anybody in our city can remember,” said Mayor Rocky Anderson. “All of a sudden, the ill feeling that has been under the surface for years has boiled way over the top with this argument” . . . “This isn’t about the plaza anymore, or the First Amendment,” said Paul Ahlstrom, a Salt Lake City Mormon who is running a Web site on the controversy. “It has become a metaphor for the tensions that exist in this city – for the Mormons who feel unappreciated, and for all the people who feel ignored and discriminated against because they’re not Mormon.” (Reid, 2002)

This chapter provides a short history of the dispute over the Main Street Plaza, as well as a description of the public hearing process initiated to address that dispute. It also describes the Bridging the Religious Divide project, including the small group dialogue initiative. This history lays the foundation for this paper’s analysis of the plaza dispute and the religious divide that underlies it, and for analysis of why the public hearing process exacerbated antagonisms in Salt Lake City while the dialogue process fostered more agonistic relationships.

The Main Street Plaza dispute

On December 1, 1998, Deedee Corradini, then the (non-Mormon) mayor of Salt Lake City, held a joint news conference with Gordon Hinkley, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Standing together, they announced a proposal to
develop “an open-space pedestrian plaza” on the block of Main Street between North and South Temple Avenues. The block – situated at the northern end of Salt Lake City’s downtown commercial center and lying between the LDS Temple and the LDS administrative buildings – would be sold to the LDS Church, closed to vehicle traffic, and transformed into a pedestrian plaza with new lawns, flower gardens, fountains and reflecting pools. The LDS Church described the proposal as “an exciting project to enhance downtown Salt Lake City” that would benefit both the city and the LDS Church. According to the church, developing “an open-space plaza on the Main Street corridor” would make it possible to: “expand the world-famous Temple Square gardens to provide pleasant meandering walkways, seating areas and open space uniquely designed for cultural events and displays in downtown Salt Lake City;” “enhance the visitor/tourist connection to the downtown business district;” and “enhance the ability to create a year-round ‘destination’ where visitors from around the world can enjoy the culture and beauty of the city” (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 2000, p. 5).

The idea of converting one or more blocks of Main Street into a pedestrian plaza had been batted around before. It dated back at least to an urban revitalization scheme developed in 1962 called the “Second Century Plan,” and had been discussed conceptually in successive planning efforts (The Church of Jesus Christ, 2002a, p. 1). Fundamental questions about the concept, however, including issues of ownership, management and design, had never been really fleshed out or debated publicly.

The announcement by Corradini and Hinkley, while heralded by many, was also controversial. One member of the Salt Lake City Council at the time, for example, stated immediately that the plan felt too much like a “done deal” and later “tried to express her
concerns to the LDS Church that the proposal would be seen as a religious issue”
(personal interview, March 18, 2003).

Over the next few months, LDS Church and city officials met with a number of
citizen organizations, including several community councils, the local Chamber of
Commerce and a transportation advisory board, to explain the plan and respond to
questions. In addition, the Salt Lake Planning Commission held two public meetings.
Many residents enthusiastically supported the plan. Others objected to the basic idea
and/or raised questions about aesthetics, traffic congestion and public access. Partly in
response to these concerns and consistent with the LDS Church’s interest in welcoming
public use, the city and church agreed to a number of conditions, including that the city
would retain a public easement across the property to guarantee public access.

At the Salt Lake Planning Commission meeting on March 4, 1999, another related
issue – one which would become central to the ongoing dispute over the Main Street
Plaza – dominated much of the discussion. Planning commissioners pressed church
attorney Mark Mascaro about whether there would be restrictions on public use of the
plaza. They asked: “Do you envision any use restrictions by the public that are more
restrictive than a public park in Salt Lake City?” (Church of Jesus Christ, 2002b, p. 15).
“Are we going to make any group of our society unwelcome from what used to be Main
Street?” (p. 36). They wanted to know if people might be excluded because they were
sporting “Dennis Rodman-type” hair, wearing “‘offensive’ t-shirts,” or because they
were considered “undesirable” (p. 36). One commissioner said he supported a
prohibition on protesting and picketing, but he felt that “there ought to be some First
Amendment expression” (p. 37). The commissioner proposed that an additional
condition – “that there be not more restrictive use of the Plaza for the public than is currently permitted in a public park, with the exception that there could be no organized picketing or protest” – be adopted by the Planning Commission to ensure “that no element of society be denied access to this space” (p. 35).

In response, Mark Mascaro, the LDS Church attorney, said that specific restrictions had not yet been drafted. But he made it clear that the church would want to restrict “certain kinds of behaviors, protesting, things like that . . .” (p. 15) in order to protect “people’s quiet enjoyment of the . . . plaza” (p. 16). He specifically noted that:

we would want to restrict certain kinds of behaviors, protesting, things like that that we’ll work with the City on. Similar to your Gallivan Center’s, I understand, restrictions on displays there so it will be open to use by the public for the kind of things that a park is meant for, which is you know, walking, reading, using. We will not be wanting certain behaviors on the area that will be disruptive of that. (p. 15)

Mascaro, however, did not raise any objection to the additional condition proposed by the Planning Commission. Rather, he seemed to indicate that the kinds of activities the commissioners were asking about would be permitted. Mascaro stated:

a good example, would be what can you do as you walk across the Plaza right now and through Temple Square right now and I, I doubt if anyone has been stopped because of hair, t-shirt, um, five kids together . . . I don’t believe that is the kind of restrictions we are looking at, at all. It is more along the lines . . . of things that would be offensive in terms of protest, banners picketing, things like this. (p. 45)

At the end of the evening, the Planning Commission voted to approve the sale and closure of Main Street by a 7-to-1 vote. Their recommendation included 15 conditions, including the one specifically discussed at the meeting – that the plaza would be no more restrictive than a public park, except that there would be no picketing or protesting (p. 46).
The ensuing paperwork on the Planning Commission decision, however, inexplicably failed to include reference to the prohibition against protests. Furthermore, according to materials from the LDS Church, the Planning Commission’s “public park” condition “came as a complete surprise to church representatives” (May, 2002, November 30). Especially without the caveat disallowing protesting and picketing, the condition was seen as creating a serious risk that the plaza would create a protest zone. Because the LDS Church felt that this would destroy the environment the church intended to create on the plaza, LDS officials notified the city that the condition was a deal killer. The church informed the city that if an explicit public park condition remained, the church could not go forward with the project. Subsequently, the city agreed to drop the public park language (The Church of Jesus Christ, 2002b).

When the Salt Lake City Council met a month later (on April 13, 1999) to consider the future of Main Street, the public park condition had been eliminated from the petition under consideration by the council. In its place was a condition authorizing the LDS Church to prevent certain activities on the plaza. These included: loitering, assembling, partying, demonstrating, picketing, distributing literature, soliciting, sunbathing, carrying firearms, as well as offensive, indecent, vulgar or disorderly speech, dress or conduct.

Planning commission member Craig Mariger, who was in the audience, brought the change to the attention of the city council and the audience. Mariger complained that the restrictions detailed in the petition before the city council were “absolutely just the contrary” to the condition recommended by the Planning Commission (Church of Jesus
“The purpose of the Planning Commission’s condition was that every person would be invited and feel invited into this space,” he said. “[W]hether it’s right or wrong or wrongly felt, not everyone in this community feels invited into Temple Square and feels that they can go into that space and use it like a park (p. 79) . . . This doesn’t sound like a public space to me, it sounds like an annex to Temple Square” (p. 80).

The Salt Lake City Council, after hearing public discussion and debate on this and other issues, voted 5-to-2 to adopt an ordinance approving the closure of Main Street and its subsequent sale to the LDS Church. Under the deal, Salt Lake City retained a 24-hour easement, and the LDS Church could control behavior on the plaza. ¹

Within a month, on May 5, 1999, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) sent a letter to Mayor Corradini and the Salt Lake City Council asserting that the restrictions on behavior were unconstitutional and requesting their elimination. The ACLU argued that because of its unique history and ongoing use as a public thoroughfare, the Main Street Plaza maintained its historical status as a forum for free speech activities, and that because of this status, it was a violation of the First Amendment for the city to grant the LDS Church regulatory authority over the views expressed and the nature of the conduct permitted on the property. Writing for the ACLU, then legal director Stephen Clark wrote:

¹The final agreement, executed in the form of a Special Warranty Deed and signed by Mayor Corradini and a representative for the LDS Church, provided for an easement retained by the city for pedestrian access and passage only, and authority by the church to deny access to those who engage in certain activities, including loitering, assembling, partying, demonstrating, picketing, distributing literature, soliciting, sunbathing, carrying firearms, as well as offensive, indecent, vulgar or disorderly speech, dress or conduct (Special Warranty Deed, 1999, April 27).
In summary, Main Street, like all public streets, is and always has been a traditional public forum, a uniquely American institution central to the “marketplace of ideas,” open to the unorthodox as well as the conventional. It never has been, is not now, and must not be allowed to become an extension of Temple Square. To do so would not only send a message of exclusion and force homogeneity to our increasingly diverse community and the world we claim to welcome, but would violate fundamental rights that protect all of us – including the LDS Church and its members. Therefore, we call upon you to protect those rights by ensuring that access to the heart of our city will be permitted without vague and unconstitutional restrictions. (ACLU, 1999)

When the city declined to eliminate the restrictions, the ACLU filed a lawsuit against the city in November 1999. The First Unitarian Church in Salt Lake City signed on as plaintiff.

Meanwhile, the LDS Church constructed the Main Street Plaza, opening it to the public on October 7, 2000. As represented in the original proposal, it was elaborately landscaped with lush flower gardens, trees and shrubbery, and included a massive reflecting pool at its center. A portion of the east wall surrounding the Mormon Temple had been removed, providing a view to plaza visitors of the Temple’s impressive architecture. As promised, the plaza included wide open sidewalks providing an open thoroughfare for residents and visitors to Salt Lake City. In the prayer of dedication, LDS President Gordon Hinkley included a plea that “the plaza be seen as a place of peace – an oasis in the midst of this bustling city – an island of quiet beauty where the weary may sit and contemplate the things of God and the beauties of nature” (Hinkley, 2002).

Only a few months after the plaza opened, in January 2001, the Federal District Court of Utah ruled against the ACLU. Specifically, the court sided with contentions made by the city and the LDS Church that the sale and improvements rendered on the property made it no longer a public forum subject to constitutional protections. Six
months later, however, the ACLU appealed the decision to the 10th Circuit Court. And on
October 9, 2002, the circuit court ruled in favor of the ACLU.

Contrary to the district court, the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals found in its 39-page ruling that the city's retention of the public access easement and the public nature of the sidewalks made the Main Street Plaza a public forum where free speech was protected. As a result, the Court of Appeals said, the restrictions imposed on conduct, dress and speech were unconstitutional. "The city cannot take action that runs afoul of our first and primary amendment," said the court. "The city has ... attempted to create a 'First Amendment-Free Zone' on the easement and this attempt ... must fail" (First Unitarian Church v. Salt Lake City Corp, 2002, p. 21).

The Court of Appeals decision re-ignited the debate over the Main Street Plaza. As a physical space and as a metaphoric symbol, the Main Street Plaza became hotly contested ground.

Salt Lake City residents faced many questions. How should Salt Lake City respond to the Court of Appeals decision? Should it accept the court's ruling and allow free speech on the public easement through the plaza? Or should the city resist the ruling, either by seeking an appeal to the Supreme Court and/or by relinquishing the public access easement to the LDS Church? Are there other alternatives? And how should the city decide? As residents struggled to answer these questions, the underlying divide between Mormons and other residents - already simmering in the original debate over the sale of Main Street to the LDS Church - deepened.

The reactions of the ACLU and the LDS Church to the Court of Appeals decision were swift. The LDS Church denounced the decision, requested the Court of Appeals to
reconsider, and promised to appeal the decision to the Supreme Court if necessary. The solution, said the church, was for the city to relinquish the easement. In the church’s view, neither it nor the city ever intended the Main Street plaza to become a forum for public protest when they entered into the transaction creating the plaza. Rather, as Presiding Bishop Burton wrote:

The intent of both Salt Lake City and the Church was to create a beautiful plaza for the enjoyment of everyone, and with access 24 hours a day.... The new plaza was to be a place of peace and quiet beauty in the center of our bustling city that would unite the two halves of the Church campus. Specifically, both the city and Church agreed that public protests and demonstrations would not be appropriate on this church-owned property. (Burton, 2002)

The church always intended that there be open public access to the plaza, said Burton, and it remained committed to allowing public access. But it deserved the right to regulate conduct to ensure that the plaza remain a place of peace, rather than a source of controversy.

The ACLU and its plaintiffs applauded the decision. “American is fundamentally a democracy where diverse cultures and different ideas meet on common ground,” said Reverend Tom Goldsmith of the First Unitarian Church. “The court has ruled that Salt Lake City is no exception” (ACLU, 2002, October 9). The ACLU threatened to sue if the city relinquished the easement and allowed the LDS Church to control conduct. Such a move would violate the city’s promise to the residents of Salt Lake City to preserve public access, said the ACLU. Moreover, it would be unconstitutional; First Amendment rights could not be extinguished by such sleight of hand. According to the ACLU, the best solution was to adopt “reasonable content-neutral time, place and manner” regulations. Such regulations could “balance all competing interests” by regulating the
time, place and manner of speech on the plaza in a way that recognizes such legitimate public objectives as public safety and accommodating competing uses of the easement “without running afoul of the Constitution” (ACLU, 2002, October 18).

Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson – elected after the sale of Main Street – took the position that he had a duty to protect the public’s right to access as provided by the easement in the warranty deed. After concluding that access could not be ensured without maintaining the easement, Anderson also called for the development of time, place and manner regulations to resolve the issue. Such regulations, said Anderson, could “both protect the rights and interests of the public, and help create a peaceful atmosphere on the Main Street plaza” (May, 2002, December 7). Two months after the appeals court decision, Anderson unveiled draft regulations. They defined the easement as the 660-foot-long, 15-foot-wide walkway along the plaza’s east side, the sidewalk farthest away from Temple Square. Leafletting would be allowed along that path, as well as other peaceful, expressive activities, including proselytizing and carrying signs. Protests involving two or more people would be limited, however, to 5-by-24 foot areas on either end of the plaza, and require a city-issued permit. The LDS Church could control the rest of the plaza. It could prohibit leafletting, protesting and proselytizing by other faiths. It could also ban smoking and sunbathing and regulate visitors’ dress, as long as it did not prohibit “expressive dress” throughout the plaza, including on the easement.

Public opinion about what to do with the plaza divided largely along religious lines, with members of the LDS Church largely advocating that the city relinquish its easement and other residents largely arguing that the city should retain it. A statewide poll of 1,252 residents conducted by Dan Jones and Associates for the Deseret News and
KSL News in late October, 2002, for example, showed that 64% of the LDS people polled supported *extinguishing* the easement, while 73% of non-LDS people polled supported *maintaining* the easement (Snyder, 2002, November 10). A poll conducted by Valley Research for the Salt Lake Tribune in early December, 2002, showed similar results. According to the Tribune survey, 60% of the Mormons polled thought the city should acquiesce to claims by the LDS Church that it owns the plaza, while only 30% of non-Mormons took this position (Fantin, 2002).

Moreover, another Valley Research poll of 600 adults along the Wasatch Front for the Salt Lake Tribune in December, 2002, showed that residents in Salt Lake City believed the plaza dispute had exacerbated the social divide between members of the LDS Church and other residents. The poll showed that 45% of those who believed there was a divide felt it had deepened in the past year. This was in contrast to a year earlier when only 10% thought the divide was getting worse. Equally notable, the percentage of Mormons who felt the divide was getting worse had jumped from 6% to 43% (Moulton, 2002, December 15).

The survey confirmed that the reason for increasing divisiveness was the dispute over the Main Street Plaza. Within the city's bounds, 78% of non-Mormons and 72% of Mormons surveyed acknowledged a serious divide between the two groups. In addition, more than three out of five Salt Lake City residents said the fight over Main Street had adversely affected relations between the two groups (Moulton, 2002).

The deepening divide between Mormons and non-Mormons in Salt Lake City reverberated through the public discourse over the Main Street Plaza. Accusations of religious bias by elected leaders was one hot spot. It was repeatedly noted in the media,
for example, that the votes for closing Main Street – including the original 5-to-2 Salt Lake City Council vote to sell Main Street and a subsequent 6-to-1 city council vote by a newly elected council (with three different members) to reconfirm that outcome – fell along Mormon/non-Mormon lines. Similarly, it was observed that the district court judge who ruled in favor of the restrictions was Mormon, as was the governor who appointed him.

Mayor Rocky Anderson, a Mormon by descent but not current practice, accused some members of the city council of bias because they were LDS. “There are some members of the city council more interested in doing the bidding of the religious organization to which they belong than they are in representing the best interests of the city as a whole,” said Anderson (May, 2002, November 17). Criticized by a city council member for his remark, the mayor said, “I stated what I think everybody in this community knows to be the truth but never seems to want to discuss.” Biases of any kind, he said, “need to be disclosed and discussed rather than swept under the rug” (Moulton, 2002, November 23).

Anderson himself was similarly accused of bias, both for and against the LDS Church. One Salt Lake Tribune columnist accused Anderson of pandering to LDS Church leaders. “In a city, that unlike the rest of the state, is barely half LDS anyway, what is this growing concern you have to placate church leaders and squeeze out of this mess like you are writing some philosophy term paper” (Mullen, 2002, October 17). Another critic called Anderson “dishonest, unwise and downright evil” for being an apostate (Moulton, 2002, November 23).
In letters-to-the-editor and in comments at public meetings, Mormons disparaged non-Mormons and non-Mormons disparaged Mormons. Even in civil exchanges, the growing tension between the two groups was apparent. An editor for the Salt Lake Tribune wrote that the letters to the paper’s Public Forum about the Main Street Plaza:

are among the most impassioned letters I have read in a newspaper. Some letters open in anger and then cool off. Others begin in a tone of “come, let us reason together” and fairly quickly proceed to abuse. Many writers are baffled that others can’t see the sheer rightness, justice, of their cause. Others count the way in which “theocracy” is utterly beyond the pale. (Anderson, 2002)

One example from a Mormon resident is:

It appears that many “non faithful” just don’t get it. The Temple Square complex, including the Main Street plaza, is among the most serene and beautiful creations by man to be found on Earth. People flock from all corners of the Earth to view it and to experience the feeling of peace that is found there. . . . Why are there those who would desire anything but to maintain such a location of tranquility and to assure that it is enhanced by excluding disruptive activities such as offensive language, distribution of malicious materials, pollution of the atmosphere, etc. Those whose determination is to destroy or prevent that which is good should examine the real purpose of their destructive thinking and should question their own status within the human family. (Crown, 2002)

A similar example from a non-Mormon resident is:

I hope they waste millions of dollars taking it to the Supreme Court and for once be shown they don’t own this state anymore. When they petitioned to join the Union, they agreed to obey the laws of the land, including free speech and free assembly. They seem to forget they are only one voice among many now. Peace and tranquility are in the eye of the beholder. It is not for the chosen 12 to dictate to me. (Elk, 2002)

In this atmosphere of deepening contention, Mayor Rocky Anderson – who had repeatedly issued public statements explaining and defending his position that the easement must be maintained to ensure public access – suddenly switched course. At a press conference on December 16, 2002, Mayor Anderson announced a plan that would extinguish the easement on the Main Street Plaza, allowing the LDS Church to reinstate
restrictions of speech, dress and conduct on the plaza. In exchange, the city would receive two acres of LDS Church-owned land in Glendale, a neighborhood on the west side of Salt Lake City (valued at about $93,000), and a pledge by the Alliance for Unity (a citizens group formed to help heal the divide in Salt Lake City) to raise $5 million for the construction of a community center on the property. Flanked by community and LDS representatives, Anderson heralded the plan as a way to “build a better, more respectful, more compassionate community” (May, 2002, December 17).

Anderson’s detailed description of his time, place and manner regulations had only been on the streets for 6 days. Asked why he was setting that remedy aside, Anderson said the proposal was not acceptable to the LDS Church, several members of the city council seem unsupportive, and, although the ACLU had earlier expressed support for the proposal, he was concerned that they might sue (Anderson, 2003, March). Some speculated that Anderson’s turnabout was motivated by a recent public opinion poll which showed the mayor losing political support among residents, especially Mormons. But Anderson – who called his proposal “A Turning Point for Peace” – said his motive was to end the divisiveness in Salt Lake City. “Faced with growing divisiveness each day,” he said, “I knew we must reach some resolution in a timely manner . . . Perhaps most important, without a resolution of this conflict, the Plaza would be constant wedge between many members of our community” (Anderson, 2003, March 2).

Anderson’s new “peace” proposal was the focus of public comment at a public hearing held the following evening before the Salt Lake City Council. Hundreds of citizens packed the city council chambers and a local public television station broadcast
the three hour meeting. The majority of the nearly 100 speakers praised the mayor’s plan, but critical comments peppered the presentations, and contention was in the air.

Two months later, on February 19, 2003, the LDS Church issued a formal statement backing the mayor’s proposal. That same day, the mayor’s office launched a spate of public meetings, visiting most of the same community groups who had met with the city and church in 1999 about the proposed sale of Main Street. The staff delivered a 30-minute PowerPoint presentation and handed out a full color brochure describing the mayor’s proposal. The proposal was pitched as a way to “heal the divide” in Salt Lake City, and to help a disadvantaged part of town.

Although all the community groups and civic organizations visited by the mayor’s team formally signed off on the plan, the public response to the mayor’s proposal was mixed. Those supporting the plan often described it as a way to end the divisiveness in Salt Lake City, to protect the plaza as a place of peace and/or to help a disadvantaged part of town. For example, the Rt. Rev. Carolyn Tanner Irish, a member of the Alliance for Unity, wrote:

The strain of this conflict is extremely costly, not only for the parties involved but for the general civility and peace of our city. That cost may not be as measurable as legal fees and property values, but it is there and it is significant. Finally, the proposal opens new possibilities for assisting the underserved population on the west side of our city. (Irish, 2003)

However, critics of the plan accused the mayor of caving in to the church and trading constitutional rights for an “unrelated ‘feel-good’ community center” (May, 2003, February 23). For them, the mayor’s “turning point for peace” only deepened the divide in Salt Lake City. “This is not a solution to the easement problem,” said one citizen, “This is a solution to the pressures coming from the Church” (May, 2003, February 5).
“Rocky caved,” wrote another. “The LDS Church won... What a sham” (Mullen, 2002, December 17).

On April 9, 2003, the Salt Lake City Planning Commission met to consider the mayor’s proposal. It was the plan’s last stop before consideration by the city council. After more than 5 hours of hearing from city officials, church leaders, the ACLU and the public, the Planning Commissioners voted 4-to-3 against the mayor’s plan. Those voting for the plan spoke about the need to find a solution to the Main Street Plaza dispute, heal the divisiveness in Salt Lake City, and help the west side. Those voting against the plan spoke about the need to preserve public access, allow dissent, and encourage dialogue between cultures (May, 2003, April 10).

Two months later, in June 2003, the mayor’s “land for peace” proposal came before the city council. The details of the proposal remained essentially the same as when it was first announced. In exchange for relinquishing its pedestrian easement across the Main Street Plaza, the city would receive two acres of LDS Church-owned land on the city’s west side, approximately $4 million in donations to build a Unity Center there, plus the church’s agreement to split the attorney fees owed by the city to the ACLU. After holding two more public hearings on June 3 and June 10, 2003, the city council voted 6-0, with one abstention, to approve the mayor’s plan.

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2 According to the Salt Lake Tribune, the financial details of this exchange were as follows. The easement relinquished by the city was appraised at $500,000. The items received by the city were valued at $5,379,586: LDS Church’s contribution to attorney fees, $275,000; donation by LDS Foundation to build the Unity Center, $250,000; donation from the Alliance for Unity to build the Unity Center, $3.75 million; additional land and money from James Sorenson, $1 million (May, 2003, May 15).
The city council’s vote ostensibly resolved the Main Street Plaza dispute. With the city’s relinquishment of the easement, the LDS Church was free to control speech and behavior on the plaza without violating First Amendment rights. Moreover, at least on the surface, a majority of city residents appeared to support the council’s decision. A Salt Lake Tribune poll released a few days before the vote, for example, showed that 56% of residents supported the mayor’s plan, with support “slightly stronger among people living outside Salt Lake County and among Mormons” (May, 2003, June 9).

Citizens’ comments in the press indicate, however, that at least some residents who ostensibly supported the mayor’s plan were half-hearted in their endorsement. More significantly, citizens’ comments indicated that the city council’s decision did little to resolve the contentious divide between Mormons and non-Mormons that underlay the dispute, and that the dispute had intensified. As one member of the Alliance for Unity (which donated $3.75 million to build the Unity Center called for in the plan) said:

the proposal to trade the easement for land and the alliance’s money to build a west-side community center in Glendale is more about ending discussion of the plaza than it is about accomplishing the proposal’s main goal: Helping to mend the deep-rooted divisions between Mormons and others in the community. . . . In terms of healing the underlying feelings that exist in our community, we need to take more steps than this. (May, 2003, June 9)

The director of religious studies at Utah Valley State College expressed similar sentiments:

The plaza is a manifestation of some fairly deep cultural divisions. The solution, I’m ambivalent about. It’s a solution that gets it [the plaza] off the minds of people. I don’t think there’s a widespread sense that it’s going to help solve the divisions in the community. There have been so many years of mutual suspicion, it’s going to take a lot of effort to overcome that. (May, 2003, June 9)

In a similar vein, the Salt Lake Tribune editorialized:
few compromises are perfect. . . . the deal itself offered the best way to settle a knotty dilemma. . . . “Land for peace” . . . will not bridge the religious fault line which bisects this community and which has been deepened by the plaza debate. But no accommodation could do that either. (“Our View,” 2003)

The Bridging the Religious Divide Project

On a Saturday morning two years later, in late April 2005, 120 people gathered in 13 small groups in a community center in Salt Lake City. They were meeting for what was ostensibly a very simple purpose – to have a conversation. However, apprehension as well as anticipation permeated the room. There was anticipation because this was the first gathering of the city’s Bridging the Religious Divide small group dialogue project. There was apprehension because no one knew quite what to expect. The topic on the table was the “unspoken divide” – the social and cultural chasm between members of the LDS Church and those who are not members. Often referred to as the 800 pound gorilla in Salt Lake City’s living room, the gorilla was usually relegated to silence. The citizens sitting around the tables, however, were about to invite the gorilla into the conversation. The story of how this extraordinary morning came about, and what speaking the unspoken produced, is described below.

As noted above, the city council’s vote to approve the mayor’s “peace plan” may have resolved the Main Street Plaza dispute on paper, but it did not resolve the issue in the hearts of many Salt Lake City residents. Consequently, in the spring of 2004, a year after the city council vote, Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson took steps to address the public’s, as well as his own, continuing concerns about the divide between Mormons and non-Mormons in Salt Lake City. As a first step, the mayor’s office convened a committee of about 15 individuals from diverse religious or spiritual orientations to help
design an initiative to “bridge the religious divide.” This committee, whose membership evolved over time, first convened in April, 2004 and met periodically over a period of about 9 months.

With the input of this committee, the mayor’s office eventually initiated a two-phase project. The first phase involved community forums at which citizens were invited to address the questions, “What would make Salt Lake City a more compassionate community?” and “What is your role in this process?” On three different occasions in the fall and winter of 2004-2005, citizens packed public meeting rooms to respond to these questions and to share their perspectives on the religious divide. The format was fairly traditional. A microphone was set up facing the audience and the citizens were invited to line up to speak to the audience for several minutes. The meetings were later broadcast repeatedly over local television and radio stations.

The second phase of the project provided for the establishment of small dialogue groups. The purpose of this phase was defined as “dialogue” – an opportunity to “have a conversation” across religious differences and to explore whatever issues, feelings and concerns emerged between group members. The 120 citizens who signed up to participate in the project were sorted into 13 groups, each with approximately 8 to 10 members. Each group included several active members of the LDS Church as well as people from other religious or spiritual orientations. Participants included Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, Wiccans, Buddhists, atheists, agnostics, people who identified with no particular religious path and people who embraced multiple religious paths. All groups agreed to meet at least four times between April 30 and October 1, 2005. (A few groups
met more than four times and continued to meet into the next year.) Each group was assigned a trained facilitator.

At first, many participants in the dialogue groups approached the process with trepidation. Some worried that the atmosphere would be contentious. Others feared being the target of “venting.” As the dialogues progressed, however, a palpable sense of relief – and appreciation – pervaded the process. In part, this was because the dialogue groups represented the first time many participants could speak candidly with people who wanted to listen about experiences and feelings that had long troubled them. As one participant reflected, the dialogue groups “gave people a place to talk about what was sometimes unspeakable in their own circles” (PHW, November 12, 2005). Another participant commented during a dialogue group, “I came in prepared to meet people with an axe to grind who wanted to grind it on me. But I feel we have been able to dialogue freely and we’ve had real issues. I never felt attacked” (PDG, #11).

The character and focus of discourse varied within the groups. Groups discussed core beliefs, shared their experiences of the divide, explored causes and contributions, and grappled with questions about how to negotiate difference in their own lives. Some conversations were more analytical and outward looking. Most often, however, the focus was on personal experience, with people sharing stories from their own lives.

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3 As explained in more detail in Chapter 3, Methods, the anonymity of individuals who participated in the Bridging the Religious Divide dialogue project is protected throughout this paper by the use of 3 codes: PHW, November 12, 2005, for a comment made by a participant during a Harvesting workshop; PDG for a comment made by a participant during a dialogue group or in an interview about a dialogue group; and PAC for a comment made by a participant during a meeting of the mayor’s advisory committee or in an interview about the advisory committee. The number following the abbreviation PDG identifies the dialogue group in which the comment was made.
A number of key themes emerged in the dialogue groups, summarized below.

**The divide is pervasive; people experience it at work, at school, in social settings, and in their own families**

The discourse in the dialogue groups revealed that while many people in Salt Lake say they are untouched by the religious divide, it is very real – although largely unspoken – for many others. Many participants described struggling to negotiate the divide at work, at school, in social settings, and – perhaps most difficult – in their own families. Said one participant:

> Salt Lake City is like the South was. This town is divided, except it is divided by religious affiliation rather than skin color. It controls who we hang out with. Who we date. Who we marry. But I would normally never say it out loud. (PDG, #11)

Another participant said:

> I listen to radio shows and hear people trying to be polite. They are so worried that what they have to say could hurt someone that they decide they don't have pain to express or axes to grind. But the divide is there in hundreds of engagements every day. (PDG, #11)

Many participants also talked poignantly about their struggle to negotiate the divide in their own families. This included individuals who had left the LDS Church but were part of extended LDS families, as well as individuals who had converted to the church but were part of extended non-Mormon families. Describing the tension in her own family, one participant asked, “How do I negotiate this sense of division in my own family? My family is where I go for love” (PDG, #11). Another participant observed, “When family members choose to live on opposite sides of the divide, it can result in anger, losses and estrangement within families that span generations” (PHW, November 12, 2005).
Some individuals – especially ex-Mormons or Mormon converts – described feeling like the divide runs right through them. Said a non-Mormon participant who was raised in an extended LDS family, “I come from the outside and the inside” (PDG, #11). Said another participant who grew up outside the LDS Church but converted to Mormonism, “I am tired of trying to be both in a place that wants me to be one or the other. I am somewhere part of both sides and I just want to be free. Please, just let me be both without putting me in a box” (personal interview, November 7, 2005).

The divide causes a lot of pain

The discourse in the dialogue groups also revealed that citizens on both “sides” of the divide in Salt Lake City felt isolated, marginalized and socially erased because of the religious divide. In every group, Mormons and non-Mormons alike described painful experiences where they were judged, dismissed, excluded or even repudiated by others because they were LDS or because they were not LDS. “My child was shunned because of her beliefs,” said one participant (PDG, #10). “My office mates don’t invite me to their parties,” said another (PDG, #11). “I hear remarks when my back is turned,” noted someone else (PDG, #10).

Mormon and non-Mormon participants also repeatedly said they felt stereotyped – perceived as a category and then dismissed. “There is a manager at my work,” noted one participant. “He said all LDS people are either brainwashed or stupid. I said, ‘Wait a minute. You don’t know me. I’m me. Not LDS me’” (PDG, #3). Said another, “People look at me and because I have long hair they assume I’m either crazy or evil” (PDG, #12).

Many participants said they felt children suffered the most from the religious divide. In sharing their experience of the divide, many participants described the
experiences of their children, or told stories from their own childhood. Said a non-Mormon, for example, “It was difficult for me growing up. I’m not black or gay but I definitely know what it is like being on the outside looking in” (PDG, #10). Said a Mormon participant, “In high school, I had seminary in the morning. People would say to me, ‘What is that? A crack house you are going to?’ I had friends who labeled me as a ‘polygamist.’ They didn’t do me any physical harm. But why didn’t they just ask me what I believe?” (PDG, #3).

The divide is more complex than many realize and there are many perspectives on what causes or contributes to it

The discourse within the dialogue groups also revealed that while many residents of Salt Lake City experience a definite chasm between Mormons and non-Mormons, these two groups are more complex than the terms might first suggest. For example, as Davies (2000) and Knowlton (2006) explain, the LDS community within Utah is not homogenous in respect to an individual’s relationship to the church. It includes a “church within the church” (Knowlton, 2001, p. 2), that is, a population of highly committed or “temple” Mormons – individuals who are very active in church duties and temple rituals. It also includes a population of “domestic ward” Mormons, that is, individuals who are still very committed to the church, but are less active in some church activities and temple rituals. (According to Davies (2000) and Knowlton (2006), “temple” Mormons comprise about 20% of the population, while “ward” Mormons comprise about 80%.) In addition, as the dialogue groups revealed, the Mormon community also includes individuals who refer to themselves as “cultural Mormons.” These are people who do not attend LDS Church activities and may even not fully subscribe to Mormon religious beliefs, but who
have strong cultural ties to the LDS community, often because they were raised or live within an extended family network that is LDS.

Similarly, the non-Mormon population within Salt Lake City includes individuals with very different relationships to the LDS Church. For example, the non-Mormon population includes people who have never belonged to the LDS Church and who have no family or cultural ties to the LDS community. It also includes people who were once members of the LDS Church but who have left the denomination, as well as people who have never been members but have strong family ties with people who are or once were members. In addition, some individuals who are formally members of the LDS Church but have become inactive may self-identify as “non-Mormons.”

Finally, the dialogues revealed that there are many perspectives on what causes or contributes to the divide. Many participants suggested, for example, that the divide is more cultural than religious, that is, arising from different social norms and practices than from different religious beliefs. Others argued that the divide is rooted in history; Mormons emigrated to Utah because they were persecuted and, as a result, may tend to be protective against “outsiders.” A substantial number of participants insisted that the divide emerges due to an imbalance of “power,” that is, because Mormons dominate the state politically. Many pointed to fear, as well as a desire to protect what is held dear, as contributing factors. Some discussed how the desire to pass on one’s values to one’s children exacerbates the divide.

During the dialogues, certain issues frequently emerged as points of tension. Some of the most common were: the claim that the LDS Church is the “one true church;” proselytizing by Mormons; stereotyping of Mormons as “sheep” or “mindless;” “bashing”
of Mormons by non-Mormons; the dominant political influence – or “power” – of the Mormon community in Utah; and the passage of “morals” legislation (such as laws governing same-sex marriage, gay adoption, the consumption of liquor) by the Mormon-dominated state legislature. Dialogue about these issues was sometimes “edgy” or challenging. Often, however, such dialogue led participants to grapple with deeper questions, such as how to live with difference, or what it means to show respect.

In November 2005, many of the participants in the dialogue project gathered at a city-sponsored Harvesting workshop. The purpose of the workshop was to identify insights and outcomes of the project and to discuss next steps. Feedback gathered at this workshop as well as personal interviews with participants indicate that the dialogue process was transformative for many participants.

Most participants reported coming away with new insights and expanded perspectives. Some described feeling emotionally healed in some way. Others expressed an expanded sense of community. More specifically, many participants reported a profound shift in how they perceive “others” and how they “think” about the religious divide. When participants were asked during the Harvesting workshop, “What were the most meaningful insights you gained?,” many spoke about becoming more aware: aware of their own unconscious assumptions about others; aware that the intent behind others’ words or conduct may be different than the interpretation one presumes; and aware of how one’s own words, beliefs and behaviors may affect others. “It made me think in a different way,” said one participant (PHW, November 12, 2005). “My views are less polarized, more textured and open,” commented another (PHW, November 12, 2005). “I
am able to see things in a more nuanced way,” said yet another person (PHW, November 12, 2005).

In addition, some participants described how the process helped them work through feelings of anger, resentment and loss, and to reconnect with a sense of hope and possibility. After sharing a painful story about how the divide had affected her, one participant said, “I felt like a huge burden had lifted from me” (PDG, #11). Another participant observed, “It’s significant how transforming it can be to have someone listen to you in empathy across the divide” (PDG, #4). One person noted that the process helped her “let go of my anger” (PDG, #11). Yet another said, “The opportunity to express hurt was healing” (PHW, November 12, 2005). Someone else reflected, “This has helped me to put some things to rest” (PDG, #10).

Perhaps most significant, many participants described how the dialogue process changed the way they relate to others. Participants not only expressed feeling more welcome, and welcoming, in the community. They also described taking the initiative to reach across the divide in an effort to connect with others, something that they would not have done before. “I felt an outsider,” commented one person. “Now I feel I can be myself in community” (personal interview, November 11, 2005). “This process reminded me that we are in this community together,” said another. “It put a human face on the divide. I realized I can’t really retreat to my own side. I’ve realized we share this community” (PDG, #10). One participant, who said he feared that the “plaza dispute was the opening shot in a civil war,” recounted how he volunteered to help search for a lost boy and ended up working side by side with Mormons who “not only served me coffee (a substance avoided by Mormons) but also laughed at my off-color jokes” (PDG, #11). A
number of participants described attending the religious services of those they earlier might have thought of as “other,” including a Wiccan ceremony in the forest celebrating the coming of spring. Two participants who felt marginalized and isolated in their neighborhood because of the divide decided to organize a block party. One participant who had never spoken to her neighbors since a painful encounter seven years ago invited them over for lunch.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The primary objective of this thesis is to explore what discursive strategies can:
(1) foster agonistic (rather than antagonistic) relationships between disputants who
identify with incommensurate worldviews; and (2) encourage disputants who identify
with past trauma to unfold their inclination to “foreclose” or “turn away” from others who
they feel have harmed them. This thesis takes up this question by analyzing a dialogue
project that was created in response to the Main Street Plaza dispute, a divisive conflict
that polarized residents in Salt Lake City, Utah, largely along religious lines. Research for
this thesis first involved studying and analyzing the “religious divide” in Salt Lake City.
It then involved studying and analyzing the public hearing processes convened to address
the Main Street Plaza, as well as the Bridging the Religious Divide dialogue project
initiated to address the religious divide that underlay the plaza dispute.

In conducting this research project, I employed qualitative, and more specifically,
ethnographic, methods of data collection and analysis. These methods were chosen
because they were well suited for my research interests. More specifically, they provided
me with a disciplined way to carefully study and analyze a conflict situation, and the
intervention efforts in that conflict situation, with an open mind toward what I would
learn, rather than with a preconceived hypothesis or theory through which my
observations would be filtered or against which they would be tested. As Wolcott (1999)
writes, ethnographic methods are particularly well suited to research that asks – in some form or the other – "What is going on here?" (p. 69). Similarly, Agar (1986) writes that researchers using ethnographic methods assume a "learning role," asking questions such as "Who are these people and what are they doing?" (p. 12). In other words, ethnographic methods are a particularly appropriate tool for research that seeks to understand, or to make sense of, a particular social situation, event, role, group or interaction (Creswell, 2003). According to Agar (1986), this understanding "occurs in a number of ways, although all of them involve a connection between something said or done and some larger pattern" (p. 16).

Furthermore, ethnographic methods are well suited for researchers who are interested in allowing hypothesis and theory to emerge inductively from the data collected, rather than establishing a hypothesis a priori and then using research to test it (e.g., Creswell, 2003; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) write, ethnographic research typically has a "characteristic 'funnel' structure, being progressively focused over its course. . . . In this sense, it is frequently well into the process of inquiry that one discovers what the research is really about" (p. 206). Similarly, Creswell (2003) notes that "Qualitative research is emergent rather than pre-figured. . . . The research questions may change and be refined as the inquirer learns what to ask and to whom it should be asked" (p. 182). Agar (1986) observes that researchers employing ethnographic methods "don't know where they are going to end up" (p. 16).

As noted above, I began this research project with a general "what is going on here?" question about the nature of the "religious divide" in Salt Lake City. As my
observations led me to develop theories about the nature of the conflict, the focus of my research expanded to include the public processes that were being implemented to address the “religious divide.” Again, I approached these processes with an open-ended “what is going on here?” inquiry. It was only after my observations led me to conclude that certain processes (the public hearings) exacerbated the divide while other processes (the dialogue project) ameliorated it, that I began to focus on the nature of the transformations I was witnessing, and ask what was the role of discursive practices in those transformations.

Data collection

Data collection for this study began in October 2002 and continued through June 2006. In May 2003 (prior to initiating any formal interviews), I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Utah to conduct this research project.

In conducting my research, I relied on multiple sources of data and multiple methods of gathering data. These included: participant observation of public hearings and multiple dialogue groups; interviews with participants in the dialogue project; observation of videotapes of public meetings; review of notes recorded at the Harvesting meeting for the Bridging the Religious Divide dialogue project; review of letters-to-the-editor and news articles published in the local newspapers; and review of a number of written documents, including legal documents related to the ACLU lawsuit, material published by the LDS Church and transcripts of public meetings. This reliance on multiple sources and methods of gathering data provided for triangulation – “the checking of inferences drawn from one set of data sources by collecting data from others”
Participant observation

Participant observation was one of my primary tools for data collection. According to Lindlof (1995), participant observation is an important methodology for qualitative researchers because “it is axiomatic that one needs to see a social situation from the point of view of the actors in order to understand what is happening in that situation” (p. 30). Spradley (1980) notes that researchers engage in participant observation for two reasons: “to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and to observe the activities, people, and physical aspects of the situation” (p. 54). I utilized participant observation to gather data at: public hearings and meetings about the Main Street Plaza; meetings of the advisory committee organized by the mayor’s office to design the Bridging the Religious Divide project; meetings of the small dialogue groups; and the Harvesting meeting for the Bridging the Religious Divide project.

Gold (1958) identifies four “master roles” that a researcher may assume in participant observation: complete participant, participant-as-observer, observer-as-participant, and complete observer. The roles I assumed during participant observation varied, but most often would be best described as “participant-as-observer.” Lindlof and Taylor (2002) write that a participant-as-observer “does not operate as a member who is fully integrated into the routines and subjectivities of the groups.” Rather, participation is “part of a ‘deal’ negotiated with gatekeepers . . . and usually involves a special status – usually a part-time, temporary, voluntary, and/or ‘play’ role” (p. 147).
My observations of the public hearings were “free entry” social situations where I was able to conduct research without having to ask permission (Spradley, 1980). I sought permission, however, to observe meetings of the Bridging the Religious Divide small dialogue groups. First, I requested permission from the mayor’s office to study the dialogue groups. Then I contacted the facilitator of each small group and asked them how they would feel about my observation of their group. If they were open to the idea, I asked them to check with the participants of their group. I encouraged them to deny my request if any member of their group had reservations about my presence.

I was allowed entry into eight groups. Between May and September, 2005, I observed each of these groups one to four times, for a total of 18 small group dialogue meetings observed. My specific role as participant-observer depended on the facilitator and the group. In one group, the facilitator asked me to simply observe. In the other groups, I primarily observed but would occasionally enter the dialogue. My participation was usually minimal and in response to an invitation to speak by the facilitator, or by the group process. (For example, I might say something during a “go-round,” that is, the sequential speaking of each person participating in the group.)

I was denied entry into three groups. To develop some understanding of what was happening in these groups, however, I interviewed each of the facilitators one to two times by telephone during the dialogue project. My inquiries focused on the nature of their group and the exchanges that were taking place.

During some phases of my research, the role I assumed during participant observation came closer to the category of “complete participant.” Lindlof and Taylor (2002) describe complete participants as “fully functioning members of the scene, but
they are not known by others to be acting as researchers” (p. 14). This describes my role during the period I served as a participant in the mayor’s advisory group, and when I assisted the mayor’s office in planning and facilitating the Harvesting meeting held at the end of the Bridging the Religious Divide dialogue project. To some degree it also describes my role when I was facilitating one of the dialogue groups. When I was acting as facilitator, my primary focus and concern was to serve as facilitator. In that way, I was one of the “fully functioning members of the scene.” However, in my role as facilitator I was carefully observing and making mental (and usually written) notes of what was happening in the room. These observations ended up serving a dual purpose. In the immediate moment, they served my role as facilitator. Later, they served my interests as researcher.

During all of these situations, I took “scratch” or “observational” notes during participant observation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Within a day or two, I would use these notes to create “field notes” that were much more detailed “reconstructions of events, observations, and conversations that took place in the field” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 160) as well as “impressions and evaluations of the unfolding project” (p. 159). While my field notes focused primarily on what was said during the dialogue groups, they also included observations about the emotional dynamics of the discourse, including the tone of utterances, body language, and the atmosphere in the room. I also sought to pay attention to what was not being said, especially when the discourse felt stilted or disconnected. In other words, I tried to utilize all my senses – including my intuition – in recording what was happening in the setting. As Lindlof and Taylor (2002) argue, “researchers are bodies in fields. Their sensual, visceral, and emotional experiences are
only arbitrarily detached from the allegedly more valuable contents of rational cognition” (p. 138). These field notes proved invaluable in my later analysis, as they allow me to “reenter the scene of the action and of the research at a later date” (Anderson, 1987, p. 341).

**Interviews**

Interviews also served an important role in my data collection. As Lindlof and Taylor (2002) write, “Interviews are particularly well suited to understand the social actor’s experience and perspective” (p. 173). My selection of interviewees was guided by “purposeful sampling,” that is I selected individuals to interview because I felt there was “good reason to believe that ‘what goes on there’ is critical to understanding some process or concept, or to testing or elaborating some established theory” (Schwandt, 1997, p. 128).

Prior to initiation of the Bridging the Religious Divide project, I informally interviewed 3 individuals about the religious divide in Salt Lake City to get an impression of issues that might emerge from such an inquiry. After the Bridging the Religious Divide dialogue groups had stopped meeting, I interviewed 9 individuals who each had served as a facilitator for a dialogue group, as well as 7 participants. Most of these interviews took place in October and November of 2005. A few took place in June 2006. I focused primarily on interviewing the facilitators for two reasons. First, I believed that these individuals would be able to offer conscious reflections on the dialogue process as well as provide commentary on their personal experience. Second, I had access to feedback from participants through the notes taken at the Harvesting meeting. I selected each of the 7 participants because they possessed some characteristics that were of
research interest. For example, I interviewed several Mormon participants because the majority of facilitators were non-Mormon.

The interviews were largely unstructured. I developed a list of questions, but I set these aside once I started interviewing because I wanted to see what the interviewees would say if I simply asked them open-ended questions. For example, I would begin most interviews by simply saying, “I figure you have something to say about your experience, so why don’t we just start with your observations and feelings about the experience, or, what’s on your mind, and go from there.” At some point in almost all interviews, however, I usually did ask in one form or another, “What do you feel the dialogue process produced? Did it change people? Did it change you? How? And what fostered the changes you perceived?”

Each interview was audio recorded. I also took notes and later added reflections on the interview into my field notes. I did not transcribe the interviews but listened to them for themes and quotes.

Consistent with my commitments to the IRB, I did not interview anyone until they had read and signed a consent form. By signing the consent form, an individual gave consent to be audio recorded and to have what was said utilized in material published or publicly presented. The interviewee had an option to indicate whether or not they would like their identity to be kept confidential. While a few interviewees indicated a release of confidentiality, I have chosen to protect the confidentiality of all interviewed by not providing personal names, professional titles or other information in the text of this paper that could reasonably be considered to identify someone.
Artifact data

In addition to participant observation and interviewing, I also relied on some artifact data. As Lindlof and Taylor (2002) write, “Documents can help researchers reconstruct past events and ongoing processes that are not available for direct observation” (p. 117). More specifically, I utilized: written notes recorded at the meeting held at the end of the Bridging the Religious Divide small group dialogue project to “harvest” themes and insights; news stories and letters-to-the-editor published primarily in local Salt Lake City newspapers; video tapes of several public hearings held regarding the Main Street Plaza dispute; the transcript of a Salt Lake City Council meeting; documents related to the lawsuit filed by ACLU challenging restrictions of speech on the Main Street Plaza; and documents published by the LDS Church.

Analysis

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) identify a number of steps that often comprise the process of analysis in ethnographic research. These include: reading (and rereading) a body of data to generate “sensitizing concepts” (p. 212) that help make sense of it; coding or sorting the data into categories; “clarifying the meaning” of each category and “exploring their relations with other categories” (p. 234); developing typologies and/or exemplars that may “hold out the prospect of application to data from other situations” (p. 215); and developing more definitive concepts or theories that further explain the data and address the research problem. However, as these two scholars write, “In ethnography, the analysis of data is not a distinct stage of the research. In many ways, it begins in the pre-fieldwork phase, in the formulation and clarification of research
problems, and continues through the process of writing” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 205).

This description generally reflects my process of analysis, including the fact that it was an inductive and iterative process, “with a cycling back and forth from data collection and analysis to problem reformulation and back” (Creswell, 2003, p. 183). Over time, as a result of multiple readings of and reflection on the corpus of my data, I began to develop a number of categories into which I sorted my data. These included: observations about the nature and causes of the divide; narrative descriptions about how people experience the divide; issues or points of tension around which the divide is manifested; underlying themes that resonated across these categories; shifts or turning points in perspective or attitude; and observations or reflections on the dialogue process or experience. I then studied the data in each category, further sorting the data into subcategories and watching for patterns, themes or disjunctures within or across categories.

I developed two areas of further focus. One was to identify and seek a theoretical explanation for the underlying themes or patterns that ran through the data on the nature and causes of the divide, issues of tension and how people experience the divide. I found two patterns: the clash of incommensurate worldviews and expression of pain and longing. To better understand these patterns, I read more extensively in the literature on identity and conflict, and eventually found theoretical ideas that helped provide a framework to understand and explicate these patterns.

My second focus was to look for links between the data that reflected shifts in perspective or attitude among participants of the Bridging the Religious Divide dialogue.
process and the data on the dialogue process or experience. For example, I observed that
the most dramatic descriptions of attitude change appeared to occur with individuals who
had shared their stories of past emotional trauma at the hands of an other. Informally, I
identified exemplars – “concrete interactional events, incidents, occurrences, episodes,
anecdotes, scenes, and happenings” (Lofland, 1974, p. 107) that seemed to capture re-
occurring patterns. These exemplars served as touchstones as I turned back to the
literature on conflict, dialogue, trauma and identity in search of theories that would help
explicate the patterns I was seeing in the data.

Researcher’s role

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) write that “An indefinite number of interpretations
could be constructed from any research experience, but usually the ones that researchers
choose to develop are those that they find most plausible, insightful, and/or useful” (p.
240). I agree with this statement. I believe that my analysis is well grounded in a
substantial body of data that was collected through valid methods. I also believe that the
theoretical perspectives I have brought to bear on this data are appropriate and relevant.
Yet my analysis is without question an interpretation. It presents one way to understand
the religious divide in Salt Lake City, and why and how the Bridging the Religious
Divide dialogue project helped to ameliorate that divide. I offer my analysis not as the
only “right” analysis of these issues, but as another perspective, one that I hope will be
helpful to residents of Salt Lake City and communities everywhere who are struggling
with how to live with difference.

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) also write that “all researchers . . . need to account for
how their knowledge claims are shaped by historical and cultural conditions” (p. 142).
Similarly, Creswell (1995) notes that “the researcher filters the data through a personal lens that is situated in a specific sociopolitical and historical moment. One cannot escape the personal interpretation brought to qualitative data analysis” (p. 182).

It is important for me to acknowledge that the lens through which I studied the issues raised in this research project is that of a non-native non-Mormon resident of Salt Lake City. As one person whom I interviewed said, “The divide is learned” (personal interview, June 2, 2006). There is no doubt that in coming to Utah more than 20 years ago, I entered a cultural environment from which I absorbed certain ways of perceiving Mormons and non-Mormons.

The beauty of this research project is that it challenged me to become conscious of my own assumptions as much as possible and to try and suspend those assumptions while I looked and listened and experienced with deliberate curiosity. Furthermore, the question of how we live with others who hold worldviews that don’t map onto our own, and how we “unfold” the “turn away” we tend to make from others whom we perceive to have harmed us, is for me not only an abstract question. It is also a personal search. In this way, I was one of the subjects of my own research. My field notes include reflections on my own experience as I journeyed into and through the dialogue process. They include my own effort to answer the question, “Did it change you? And if so, how?” The short answer is yes, and profoundly.

As Lindlof and Taylor (2002) write, the personal identities of individuals engaged in qualitative research “may undergo profound slippage and refashioning over the course of the project” (p. 136). As this paper is not an autobiographical ethnography, I will simply say that the project radically changed my sense of relationship to the larger
community of Salt Lake City. As I explained to my own small dialogue group at the end of the Bridging the Religious Divide project, I used to think of the community of Salt Lake City as a two-dimensional dinner plate, with myself located outside of and separate from that plate, rather like a glass of water that sits on a table separate and detached from a plate that rests nearby. Now however, I think of the community of Salt Lake City more like an orb, porous and permeable, and I experience myself as someone who moves in and out and through that orb, and who calls it home.

A note regarding the quotes used in this paper

The individual statements quoted in this paper are drawn from a number of sources. These sources include: utterances made during the dialogue groups; utterances made during the interviews I conducted; utterances made during the meetings of the mayor’s citizen advisory committee; comments recorded in writing during the meeting designed to “harvest” insights and ideas from participants in the dialogue project; and comments made in letters-to-the-editor, newspaper articles, or other publications. Except for the last category, where the authors of such comments have already publicly disclosed their identity, I keep the identity of the person responsible for the statement anonymous. In some cases, this is because the statement came from a setting where I promised confidentiality. In the case of statements from the Harvesting meeting, it is because I do not know the identity of the person responsible for the comment.

I maintain anonymity by identifying the source of the statement with an abbreviated code. The code “PDG” stands for “participant in dialogue group.” The code “PAC” stands for “participant in the mayor’s advisory committee.” The code “PHW” stands for “participant in the Harvesting workshop.” The participants at the Harvesting
meeting were, of course, also participants in the dialogue groups, but this code indicates that those quotes were recorded at that event as part of an effort to “harvest” participants’ insights and perspectives.

In the case of statements drawn from participants in the dialogue groups (PDG), the abbreviated code is followed by a number that indicates the number of the dialogue group in which I recorded the quote. In the case of quotes drawn from the Harvesting workshop or the meetings of the advisory committee, the code (PHW or PAC) is followed by the date of the workshop or the advisory committee meeting.

In addition, it is important to note that the statements cited in this paper that are drawn from the notes I took during the dialogue groups are not verbatim. They are reconstructed from notes that I took during the process. I believe the quotes capture the essence of what was said, and are usually quite close to the actual wording that was spoken, but they are do not represent a verbatim record.
CHAPTER 4

IDENTITY AND CONFLICT: A THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

This paper argues that the dispute over the Main Street Plaza, as well as the religious divide that underlies that dispute, are best understood as conflicts driven by identity-based issues. More specifically, it asserts that the plaza dispute and religious divide represent clashes between incommensurate worldviews, and the people who identify with those worldviews. In addition, it maintains that these conflicts are substantially shaped by widespread foreclosure of “the other,” a foreclosure that has emerged because of identification with unmourned trauma.

The purpose of this chapter is to present a theoretical framework for understanding the Main Street Plaza dispute and religious divide. Thus, it begins with a discussion of identity and the relationship between identity and conflict. It then outlines the thinking of several key communication and conflict theorists on moral or worldview conflict. Finally, it describes theories about the relationship between trauma and conflict.

The nature of identity

In writing about the nature and challenges of working with intractable conflicts, Gray (2003) makes a simple yet trenchant observation: “Conflict almost inevitably arises when people’s identities are threatened” (p. 21). People experience their identity as
threatened, says Gray, when they perceive others as challenging the beliefs and values that undergird who people believe they are.

Gray (2003) maintains that such challenges almost inevitably lead to conflict because they are experienced as calling into question not only the legitimacy of how a person or group has defined itself, but even its right to exist. People are not willing to compromise on these issues, she argues. "In the extreme," she writes, "to do so would produce anomie — a lack of purpose, identity or ethical values" (p. 21).

Gray’s observations are astute. Who has not experienced and witnessed the dynamic she describes at work in their own life and/or in their community? But in order to think through what Gray’s observations mean about how to understand and how to work with conflict involving identity, we need first to explore some more basic questions. What is identity? How is it formed? How is it “held” or experienced by individuals and groups?

As Hall (1996) writes, there has been “a veritable discursive explosion” around the concept of identity in recent years, an explosion that has created “novel repertoires of meaning with which the term is being inflected” (p. 1). For our purposes here, however, I will focus on three notions about identity that are widely shared and relevant to the relationship between identity and conflict.

Identity is best thought of as “identification” and is discursively constructed.

First and foremost, most contemporary scholars do not consider identity to be something that is natural, intrinsic or essential to individuals or groups. Rather, they see identities as socially constructed, that is, shaped by and within discourse, through the
process of *identification* with subject positions offered in discourse. Hall (1996), for example, describes identities as “points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” (p. 4). More specifically, Hall argues that identities are best thought of as created through a double-sided process involving “subjectification to discursive practices” and “identification” (p. 2) (or “subjection”). By *subjectification to discursive practices* he means that peoples’ identities are formed by interpellation, that is, adopting Althusser’s image, people are “hailed” into certain subject positions, or, using Hall’s words, that people are “summoned into place” (p. 13) through discourse. By *identification* or *subjection* he means that people take up identities by identifying or affiliating with some “other” – an ideal, a set of beliefs, a group. Identity, concludes Hall, is the “meeting point” or “the point of suture” (p. 5) between these two processes – on the one hand, the process of interpellation, and on the other, the process of identification. “It is not enough for the Law to summon, discipline, produce and regulate,” writes Hall. “There must also be the corresponding production of a response (and thus the capacity and apparatus of subjectivity) from the side of the subject” (p. 12). He adds, “An effective suturing of the subject to a subject-position requires, not only that the subject is “hailed,” but that the subject invests in the position” (p. 16).

In her exploration of identity and conflict, Gray (2003) offers a similar but simpler explanation of identity. Identity, she says, can be defined by how people answer the question, “Who am I?” (p. 21). And how people answer this question, she asserts, is usually determined by their *identification* with something, most commonly a social group or category. According to Gray, these groups or categories are often based on demographics (race, gender, ethnicity), location (where people live, work or “are from”),
role (one’s occupation or job), institutional associations (such as membership in a church) or interests (shared values, concerns or causes). “In general,” Gray writes, “people think of themselves as belonging to certain social categories that have given characteristics, for instance, an ‘environmentalist’ or a ‘rancher’ or a ‘New Yorker’” (p. 21). In other words, says Gray, identity emerges from identification with a self-image that is created via social category membership. Identity is therefore, “iterative,” or discursively constructed, Gray argues, “shaping and being shaped by the individual’s social and cultural experiences and memberships” (p. 21).

A similar perspective is provided by Volkan (1997), a psychoanalyst who writes about the relationship between “the psychology of we-ness” (p. 25) and conflict. Volkan argues that the identities of ethnic groups (or “emotionally bonded large groups”) (p. 27) emerge from a shared identification with a set of symbols – objects, places, stories – which hold a common or shared meaning to the members of a group, a meaning which itself has been discursively constructed. What is crucial to understanding large-group identities, says Volkan, is not “questions of investment in ethnicity versus religion, or nationality versus race, but the process of linking individual selves to the canvas of a large-group tent” (p. 97). In other words, identities are best understood through the process of identification with discursively produced subject positions.

Volkan (1997) writes that an individual’s sense of ethnicity – or identification with a particular large group – often arises originally from childhood through the identification with a “shared reservoir” (p. 91) of objects, such as “a Cuban lullaby, a Finnish sauna, a German nursery rhyme, and matzo ball soup” (p. 90). Identification with these “reservoir objects,” says Volkan, is “at the foundation of large-group identity”
(p. 91) and it is from such objects that the more abstract “ideation” (p. 91) of being Cuban, Finnish, German or Jewish emerges. Over time, Volkan writes, “a shared way of feeling about one’s large group becomes more important than the concrete symbols themselves” (p. 91). But it is by originally identifying with these reservoir objects, says Volkan, that:

children develop an invisible network, a we-ness, by which they are connected to the same reservoir. Without knowing it, they become part of an emotionally bonded large group. (p. 90)

Identity is therefore the product of the process of identification, and will vary depending on the nature of that identification. Volkan (1997) observes, “Depending on the focus of a large group’s identity, a child’s investment might be in ethnicity (I am Arab), religion (I am Shi’ite), nationality (I am French), or some combination of these” (p. 91).

The notion that identities are best thought of as emerging and enacted through identification with something – an ideal, beliefs, a group – illuminates Gray’s (2003) assertion, quoted earlier, that people often experience their identity as threatened when they perceive others as challenging their beliefs and values. This is because their identity is constructed on identification with those beliefs and values. Furthermore, as Gray has noted, a perceived challenge to those beliefs and values is experienced as a threat to one’s very being.

This relationship between identity and identification also helps to explain – at least in part – the intractability and virulence of certain conflicts. When another’s position is perceived as threatening the identifications by which someone or some group defines its identity, it can feel to the parties involved that what is at stake is one’s
survival. As noted earlier, this is not an issue amenable to compromise, or even rational debate.

Identity is multiple and evolving

A second idea about identity that is widely shared among scholars is that—contrary to historical notions—identity is not something that is unitary and fixed. Rather, it is multiple and evolving. In other words, because identity is constructed within and through discourse, and people participate in many different discourses, they develop multiple identifications, or subject positions. Furthermore, because discourse is ongoing, these subject positions are ever-evolving.

Winslade and Monk (2001) say, for example, that "The self is constituted by the myths, traditions, beliefs, assumptions, and values of one's particular culture, all developed within discourse" (pp. 44-45). As a result, they argue, it makes more sense to think of "the multiply positioned self" because "people's lives are complex and composed of the multiple identifications and subject positions that are offered to them" (p. 45). Furthermore, they point out that "In each interaction, the individual has opportunities to recreate or reconstruct himself or herself anew" (p. 45). Consequently, "identity is not fixed, nor is it carried around by the individual largely unchanged from one context to the next" (p. 45).

Similarly, Hall (1996) writes that, contrary to the meanings usually associated with the term, identities are not unitary and do not signal a "stable core of the self" (p. 3). Rather, says Hall, they are "increasingly fragmented; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions" (p. 4). Identity relates more to "the invention of tradition" than tradition itself,
writes Hall, and should be seen not as a “so-called return to roots, but a coming-to-terms with our routes” (p. 4).

Maalouf (2003) offers a similar perspective. Maalouf is a novelist who was born in Lebanon but now resides in France. His mother tongue was Arabic but he was raised within a Christian church. He describes himself as “poised between two countries, two or three languages and several cultural traditions” (p. 1). Maalouf rejects the notion that identity is something intrinsic or singular. It is not only inaccurate, writes Maalouf, but also dangerous to think that “‘deep down inside’ everyone there is just one affiliation that really matters, a kind of ‘fundamental truth’ about each individual, an ‘essence’ determined once and for all at birth, never to change thereafter” (p. 2).

Using himself as a prime example, Maalouf (2003) maintains that every individual’s identity is a composite of multiple allegiances or identifications, and that these allegiances evolve and change over someone’s lifetime. Maalouf writes:

Each individual’s identity is made up of a number of elements. . . . Of course, for the great majority these factors include allegiance to a religious tradition; to a nationality – sometimes two; to a profession, an institution, or a particular social milieu. But the list is much longer than that; it is virtually unlimited. A person may feel a more or less strong attachment to a province, a village, a neighborhood, a clan, a professional team or one connected with sport, a group of friends, a union, a company, a parish, a community of people with the same passions, the same sexual preferences, the same physical handicaps, or who have to deal with the same kind of pollution or other nuisance. (p. 11)

The idea that identities are naturally composed of multiple – and sometimes seemingly contradictory – identifications has significant implications for the field of conflict. Maalouf (2003), for example, argues vigorously that ethnic conflict around the world would be greatly diminished if individuals and societies would acknowledge – and embrace – the multiple allegiances that construct their composite identities. According to
Maalouf, this is because acknowledging one’s multiple allegiances allows one to feel empathy, at least on some level, with almost anyone. Describing his own experience as an Arab and a Christian, Maalouf says, “Thus, when I think about either of these two components of my identity separately, I feel close either through language or through religion to a good half of the human race” (p. 17). Writing more generally, he says:

A man with a Serbian mother and Croatian father, and who manages to accept his dual affiliation, will never take part in any form of ethnic ‘cleansing.’ A man with a Hutu mother and a Tutsi father, can accept the two ‘tributaries’ that brought him into the world, will never be a party to butchery or genocide. (p. 35)

In addition, says Maalouf (2003), acknowledging that one’s identity is composed of multiple allegiances compels one to recognize one’s own uniqueness, and thus the uniqueness of others. This also makes it difficult for a person to divide the world into “us” and “them,” or, in other words, to see – and dismiss – any other individual as a stereotypical member of a particular large group. “Any person of goodwill trying to carry out his or her own ‘examination of identity’ would soon, like me, discover that identity is a special case,” writes Maalouf (p.20). “No doubt a Serb is different than a Croat, but every Serb is also different than every other Serb, and every Croat is different from every other Croat” (p. 21).

On the other hand, Maalouf (2003), as well as other scholars, admits that a sense of threat or societal pressure will cause people to identify with only one of the many allegiances (or identifications) that comprise their identity. When something threatens one of the important allegiances with which a person (or group) identifies, that allegiance will tend to “swell up,” says Maalouf, and appear to represent a person’s whole identity, “eclipsing” (p. 13) other affiliations that make up that person’s (or group’s) composite
identity. Maalouf gives the example of a Italian man who is a homosexual during the
days of facism. Because his identity as a homosexual was under threat, the man's sexual
preference came to outweigh all his other affiliations, including his allegiance as an
Italian citizen, despite the fact that nationalism was at its height. "People often see
themselves in terms of whichever one of their allegiances is most under attack," writes
Maalouf (p. 26). He continues:

Where people feel their faith is threatened, it is their religious affiliation that
seems to reflect their whole identity. But if their mother tongue or their ethnic
group is in danger, then they fight ferociously against their own coreligionists. (p.
13)

Similarly, social pressure can cause people to identify more narrowly with a single
affiliation. Maalouf (2003) complains, for example, that identification with a "complex
identity" (p. 3) is marginalized in many societies. When "our contemporaries are
exhorted to 'assert their identity,'” he writes, “they are meant to seek within themselves ..
. [a] fundamental allegiance, which is often religious, national, racial or ethnic, and
having located it they are supposed to flaunt it proudly in the face of others” (pp. 2-3). It
is this identification with a single affiliation, says Maalouf, that allows identity to be
“made into an instrument of exclusion and sometimes into a weapon of war” (p. 159). It
not only encourages people to adopt attitudes that are intolerant and domineering, but can
transform people and groups into “killers or supporters of killers” (p. 30). Maalouf
warns:

Those who can accept their diversity fully will hand on the torch between
communities and cultures, will be a kind of mortar joining together and
strengthening the societies in which we live. On the other hand, those who
cannot accept their own diversity may be among the most virulent of those
prepared to kill for the sake of identity. (p. 36)
Identity operates across difference

A third notion about identity commonly stressed by many scholars is that it is constructed across difference, and at least in the case of group identity, this marking of difference often entails the promotion of one’s own group as superior in some way. Picking up themes elaborated on by Judith Butler, Hall (1996) notes, for example, that identities require a “constitutive outside” (p. 4), and inevitably entail the marking of boundaries. In other words, the delineation of “who I am” or “who we are” inherently involves marking “who I am not” or “who we are not.” Or put another way, the construction of any “I” or “we” inherently defines a “you” or “them.” Identity, writes Hall, “operates across difference, it entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of ‘frontier-effects.’ It requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process” (p. 3). Thus, Hall says, “identities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, leave out, to render ‘outside,’ abjected” (p. 5).

Reflecting research in social psychology, Gray (2003) similarly notes that the identity of most social groups are constructed in opposition to, or at least in comparison with, the identity of another group. This process, says Gray, allows groups to solidify their own identity and to conceive of themselves as superior in some way. Gray writes:

By comparing our group with others, we usually pay attention to the differences between groups and the similarities within our own group. Group members tend to see each other in a positive light, while conceiving of other groups in a less favorable light. (p. 21)

In writing about group identities, Volkan (1997) makes a similar observation. Volkan argues that groups tend not only to define themselves in opposition to other groups, but also to assert their superiority over those groups. “When ethnic groups define
and differentiate themselves,” says Volkan, “they almost invariably develop some prejudices for their own group and against others’ groups” (p. 22). Volkan describes, for example, how different groups from around the world have historically regarded themselves as human while describing other groups as subhuman. Similarly, he names a number of groups who have identified themselves as “the people” while describing all others as “enemies” (p. 25). Volkan cites W.H Auden, “If we did not have a hated ‘them’ to turn against, there would not be a loving ‘us’ to turn to” (p. 25).

The paradox that is often overlooked, but which is particularly relevant to the relationship between identity and conflict, is that while the construction of identities inherently involves the exclusion of some other, they also require one to remain in relationship to that excluded other. This is because in order for “I/we” to exist, there must be a “you/them.” Hall (1996) writes:

> Above all, and directly contrary to the form in which they are constantly invoked, identities are constructed through, not outside, difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its constitutive outside that the ‘positive’ meaning of any term – and thus, its ‘identity’ – can be constructed. (pp. 4-5)

This aspect of identity – that it operates across difference, requiring a constitutive outside to be constructed and enacted – makes identity a fertile site for potential conflict. This is because assuming an identity not only requires an individual to enter into a relationship of commonality with others who share some identification, but also to enter a relationship of difference – and possibly, of opposition – with “others” who stand outside that identification. The boundary between “us” and “them” thus may be a volatile site.
Obviously, as the peaceful coexistence of diverse ethnic groups in many places attests, it is possible to construct and enact identity across difference without provoking conflict. On a daily basis around the world, for example, many ethnic groups peacefully mark boundaries between “us” and “them” through rituals involving dress, food, language, music, stories and other activities in a peaceful, nonconflicted way. At the same time, as is evidenced by myriad examples of ethnic conflict around the world, violence frequently erupts along lines of difference defined by identities and, as Volkan (1997) puts it, groups who have lived side by side as neighbors suddenly turn on each other mercilessly.

The question of why some groups mark the difference inherent in identity peacefully and why for others that marking devolves into violence is a sweeping inquiry and beyond the scope of this paper. This analysis, however, does describe two situations – situations that are particularly relevant to the case study presented in this paper – that make the boundary between “us” and “them” particularly volatile. One is when the identities of two groups are based on identifications with moral orders, or worldviews, that are incommensurate. The second is when identification is with trauma that has been suffered at the hands of the other. As this paper makes clear, these two situations sometimes overlap.

Conflict emerging from identification with incommensurate moral orders/worldviews

Consciously or unconsciously, the identities of most people are constructed – at least in part, but often substantially – on identification with a “worldview” or a “moral order.” People with different worldviews interact and coexist all the time without
significant conflict. Problems tend to arise, however, when worldviews are incommensurate, that is, lacking a common framework for a shared understanding. As discussed more below, people with incommensurate worldviews frequently feel not only marginalized by each other, but erased. As a result, identifications based on incommensurate worldviews result in volatile boundaries between groups, and often serious conflict.

Docherty (2001), who analyzes the tragedy at Waco, Texas, as a conflict between worldviews, defines worldview as a frame or lens through which we see the world, make sense of what we see, and understand our place in the scheme of things. According to Docherty, a worldview involves a theory about the nature of what exists in the universe (an ontology), beliefs about how and to what extent it is possible to know what exists (an epistemology) and a set of values about what parts of the universe are more or less important (an axiology). Worldviews are generally not consciously held, however. Rather, they “are the unquestioned, invisible ‘given’ reality that shapes human perceptions and actions” (p. 28). In other words, worldviews are usually experienced simply as “common sense” by those who hold them, and become visible only “in encounters between persons and groups who have divergent ideas about what constitutes common sense” (p. 28).

Pearce and Littlejohn (1997), who write about how to work with conflict emerging from incommensurate worldviews, use the term “moral order” to connote the same idea. They define moral order as how a person views “being, knowledge, values” or, “the theory by which a group understands its experience and makes judgments about proper and improper actions” (p. 51). Pearce and Littlejohn specifically use the term
moral order because they want to stress that a person’s worldview includes a sense of what is “good and right” (or moral) and thus acts not only as a lens through which one understands the world, but also as a guide (or order) which directs how one should act within it. A moral order “denotes the pattern of one’s compulsions and permission to act in certain ways and one’s prohibitions against acting in other ways “ (p. 54), they write. Said another way, a moral order represents a “deontic logic of ‘oughtness,’” or “a sense that one ought to act in a particular way” (p. 52).

All these scholars stress that worldviews or moral orders cannot be reduced to values. Rather, values emerge out of worldviews. In fact, these scholars argue that worldviews or moral orders are constitutive not only of values, but of the “reality” or “world” in which a person operates. This is because they create the frame or lens through which people interpret events and make meaning.

Docherty (2001), for example, conflates “worldviewing” with “world naming” or “world making.” To a large extent, people create their world or reality by naming it, argues Docherty, and how they name it depends upon the lens, or worldview, through which they understand it. As Kevin Avruch writes in the preface to Docherty’s book, Learning Lessons from Waco, “worldviewing is connected to nothing less than worldmaking . . .” and “is constitutive . . . right down to the very foundations of alternative rationalities and the ultimate sacred realities” (2001, p. xiii).

Pearce and Littlejohn (1997) describe worldviews or moral orders as incommensurate when they cannot be “‘mapped onto,’ expressed as, or reduced to the other” (p. 15). People with incommensurate worldviews “do not agree about what counts as data or whether a particular piece of data supports, refutes, or is irrelevant to a
hypothesis” (p. 16), write the scholars. Docherty describes people with incommensurate worldviews as lacking “a framework for reaching a shared understanding” (p. 21).

Conflict between incommensurate worldviews – or moral conflict – is often expressed around “surface issues” such as abortion, sexual orientation, or school curriculum. But such conflict involves much more than differing opinions about “whether one should get an abortion, have homosexual sex, or teach creation science” (p. 51) say Pearce and Littlejohn. The real differences lie much deeper in the moral order. Conflict emerging from incommensurate worldviews, thus, is not simply about disagreement over particular issues, or even divergent interests, goals or even values. Rather, it is about “looking at the world in utterly different ways” (Docherty, 2001, p. xii).

Docherty (2001) describes conflict emerging from incommensurate worldviews as a “clash of inner worlds” or “senses of reality” (p. 25). She says that disputants in conflicts arising from incommensurate worldviews appear “to be speaking different languages and occupying different realities” (p. 11). Pearce and Littlejohn (1997), who coin the term “moral conflict” to describe conflict emerging from incommensurate moral orders, say that it involves differences over “our most fundamental and cherished assumptions about how to order our lives – our own lives and our lives together in this society” (p. 49).

This clash of “cherished assumptions” which characterizes moral conflict is often visible in the metaphors used and stories told by the conflicting parties. As Docherty (2001) writes “Narrative is one essential expression of worldviewing and worldview conflicts are marked by competing and ostensibly irreconcilable stories” (p. 58).
Docherty gives the example of a married couple involved in divorce proceedings who use different metaphors to describe marriage. According to Docherty, these incommensurate metaphors—marriage as a journey and marriage as a contract—laid the foundation for completely different ways of understanding marriage and how to live within it.

Similarly, Docherty (2001) observes how many current conflicts over forest management can be understood, in part, through the different metaphors used by the conflicting parties to describe the forest. According to Docherty, one metaphor—the forest as farm—reflects a view of the forest as a place to produce wood products through such practices as clear-cutting and monocultural replanting. Another metaphor—the forest as ecosystem—reflects a contrasting view of the forest as an interdependent community including a variety of tree species, nonfiber producing plants, animals insects and even microbes.

Similarly, Pearce and Littlejohn (1997) say that the roots of moral conflict are often most visible in the “clusters of [incommensurate] stories” (p. 13) told by the conflicting parties, stories that don’t map onto each other. They argue, for example, that the moral conflict between members of the “Religious Right” and so-called secular humanists can be seen as much, or more, in the stories told by each group, than in their positions over specific issues, such as the Equal Rights Amendment. More specifically, they describe how members of the “Religious Right” believe in divinely ordained principles which provide a clear-cut guide to right and wrong. Thus, in the stories told by the Religious Right, morality “structures everything else,” “right and wrong are clearly established” and the issue is “whether one has sufficient courage to do what one already knows is right” (p. 13).
In contrast, secular humanists are more “relativistic and/or pluralistic” in their concept of right and wrong, in part because they are “not monolithic in worldview or organization” (p. 14). Reason and intelligence are the key concepts organizing their worldview, say Pearce and Littlejohn (1997). Thus, their stories focus more on how to use education, academic freedom, free press, as well as science and technology to foster equal opportunity and fairness in a diverse world. Obviously, these two sets of stories reflect two very different social realities, and those living within those realities are likely to feel ignored – or more likely, erased – by the other.

Conflict emerging from incommensurate worldviews or moral orders tends to be intractable and prone to escalation for a number of reasons. First, people with incommensurate worldviews usually lack shared norms for addressing or managing conflict. This means that they not only differ about what they believe or think is right. They also lack shared procedures for arguing their claims and common standards for judging the validity of those arguments. As Pearce and Littlejohn (1997) assert, they may find themselves in disagreement about whether they should resolve conflict “by ballot, bullet or Bible” (p. 69). As a result, even well-intentioned efforts by one side to resolve the conflict fairly may be perceived by the other as manipulative moves to prevail.

Similarly, people with incommensurate worldviews may even lack a common basis from which to identify what is a breach of norms. As a result, says Docherty (2001), disputants often find the “naming, framing and blaming stories of the other party baffling or offensive” (p. 66). This can lead to a power struggle between parties who wish to privilege one narrative over another and further exacerbate the conflict.
Second and even more problematic, people with incommensurate worldviews lack a common grammar (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). The word “grammar” here refers not only to the use of language, but also to patterns of speaking and acting. Since the grammar practiced by a particular person or group reflects their underlying moral order, parties who hold incommensurate worldviews also speak and act with incommensurate grammars (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). What this means in practice is that while disputants may use the same language and symbols, the language and symbols will have different, and incompatible, meanings within the social reality of each side. As a result, when people with incommensurate worldviews and grammars speak with each other, or try to reason across differences, they frequently feel misunderstood. Even more problematic, they may feel that their deepest held values are being ignored, or worse, attacked and repudiated (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). This can easily evoke conflict, dramatically escalate existing conflict, or make a conflict situation intractable.

Docherty (2001) gives the example of a group of stakeholders who work together to produce a report on forest management which calls for “a healthy forest and a healthy economy” (p. 34), goals on which both groups purportedly agree. Subsequent to the release of the report, however, the same stakeholder groups accuse each other of misinterpreting the findings of the technical studies on which the report is based and misrepresenting the agreements that were reached. What began as an effort to mitigate conflict through developing shared data and common objectives leaves each group feeling betrayed and more antagonistic toward the other. The problem, says Docherty, is not maliciousness. Rather, it is that the parties “attribute contradictory (symbolic) meanings to the same data” (p. 34). In other words, because of their divergent worldviews about
the purpose and value of forests, the groups look at the same information – or even the same phrase – and draw different conclusions about what it means and what should be done.

As or more problematic, because they attribute different meanings to the same data – or even the same phrase – each group is likely to feel misunderstood, or even ignored or repudiated, by the other when they attempt to communicate. Using the case just cited, for example, if one party refers to a “healthy forest” as an objective that both parties support but implies that a healthy forest means a monoculture of trees grown for harvest, the other group is likely to feel that their concerns are being deliberately ignored or even denied. This is because for this group, a healthy forest means an undisturbed diverse ecosystem full of plants and animals, but this definition is not even being acknowledged, much less promoted. If this latter group has a strong identification with the worldview implicit in their understanding of “healthy forest,” they may even feel that their right to exist is being threatened.

As Pearce and Littlejohn (1997) write, when groups do not share a common grammar, “the presentation of one’s case sometimes intensifies, rather than settles, the conflict” (p. 5). “Using the best rhetoric available in one’s repertoire,” they write, “does not ensure understanding and respect. Rather, disputants feel the other is attacking their most cherished beliefs” (p. 5).

As noted above, grammar as used here also refers to patterns of action. Misunderstandings or offenses can also occur when groups give different meaning to the same action. Docherty (2001) describes, for example, how federal law enforcement agents filmed some Branch Davidian children in their custody drinking soda and eating
candy. They then showed the film to Branch Davidian adults remaining in the Koresh compound in order to reassure them that their children were safe. The effort backfired, however, evoking a sense of betrayal and exacerbating distrust between the two groups because candy and soda were viewed as unhealthy items by the Branch Davidians.

Groups with incommensurate worldviews, says Dochertry, can appear "to be speaking different languages" (p. 11). As a result, she says, even when both parties are acting in good faith, both may misinterpret the other's efforts, "often taking goodwill gestures as conflict escalatory moves that obligate retaliation or a hardening of positions" (p. 65).

Finally, conflict emerging from incommensurate worldviews tends to be prone to escalation, intractable and often virulent because worldviews implicate identity. As noted earlier, most people's identities are constructed at least in part on conscious or unconscious identification with a worldview. And as also noted earlier, people are not willing to compromise on issues of identity. In fact, as Maalouf (2003) notes, when people feel that one of the multiple identifications that comprise their identity is threatened, they will "fight ferociously" (p. 13) to defend it.

Some peoples' worldview may be defined by allegiance with certain spiritual or metaphysical beliefs which are largely defined by a religious institution. Others' worldview may be based on a more secularly defined set of values or principles. In either case, a challenge to the beliefs or principles that define one's worldview are often experienced as an attack on the legitimacy of "who I am" or "who we are," or even as a threat to one's right to exist. It is no wonder, then, that conflicts emerging from incommensurate worldviews tend to escalate and tip easily towards violence. Parties involved in such conflict are not fighting only about unsatisfied needs or competing
interests as traditional conflict resolution theory often suggests. They are fighting from their guts for their very survival. As Hunter (1991) writes:

Let it be clear, the principles and ideals that mark these competing systems of moral understanding are by no means trifling, but always have a character of ultimacy about them. They are not merely attitudes that can change on a whim but basic commitments and beliefs that provide a source of identity, purpose and togetherness for the people who live by them [italics added]. It is for precisely this reason that political action rooted in these principles and ideals tends to be so passionate. (p. 42)

Or, as Hawes (2006) says more succinctly, conflicts over identity entail a move to “libidinal economies” (p. 8). In other words, they evoke deeply rooted psychic and emotional responses that operate from a rationality driven by the desire and will to survive.

Identification with unmourned trauma

The potential for conflict that is latent in how identity is generally constructed and enacted is also particularly volatile when a large group defines its identity – at least in part – through identification with a trauma that has been (or is perceived to have been) suffered at the hands of another. According to Volkan (1997), who writes extensively about the relationship between trauma, identity and ethnic conflict, such identification arises when the pain and loss connected to a trauma has not been fully mourned. This lack of mourning prevents the group from being able to somehow integrate and move on from the trauma. Rather, the event and the feelings associated with it are internalized – kept alive within the group in a collective memory comprised of images, feelings and evolving interpretations of the original trauma. As a result, the group’s members are compelled to relive the event, and the feelings connected with it, albeit in ways and with people not necessarily connected to the original trauma. In his book, Bloodlines: From
Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism, Volkan (1997) describes this dynamic in more detail, and explicates how this identification with a past trauma cannot only fuel long-simmering ethnic conflicts but also ignite them into merciless violence.

Problems arise, says Volkan (1997), when a group experiences a “severe and humiliating” (p. 45) calamity that is not fully mourned, perhaps because something prevents or interrupts the act of mourning, or because the ordeal is so painful that mourning is avoided. The result is that “an internalized version of the trauma remains in the minds of the victims” (p. 42). This “mental representation” (p. 48) – as well as mental defenses against pain and loss associated with the trauma – become part of a group’s identity and can be passed on from generation to generation. Volkan uses the term “chosen trauma” (p. 48) to describe the collective memory of a calamity that once befell a group or its ancestors. He explains that he uses the word “chosen” not because any group chooses to be victimized, but because it “fittingly reflects a large group unconsciously defining its identity by the transgenerational transmission of injured selves infused with the memory of the ancestors’ trauma” (p. 48).

Victims are compelled to act out these traumatic images and defenses in various ways, says Volkan (1997). People may behave as if they have an “internal theatre” (p. 42) where the various actors in the trauma – victim, victimizer, and rescuer – “continuously perform a play” (p. 42). The trauma may be relived in dreams or daydreams. Or, says Volkan, the group may appear to suffer amnesia, become hypervigilant or completely disassociate from danger.

Another way individuals or groups deal with trauma is to “envelop” (Volkan, 1997, p. 42) their most painful images or self-representations, “externalize” (p. 42) them
onto others, and then seek to control them outside of themselves. In this way, says Volkan (1997), the experience of trauma is transmitted transgenerationally – passed on and lived out by others. For example, says Volkan, when a large group has undergone massive trauma, the victimized adults may suffer a kind of guilt and shame for not having been able to protect their children. An older person may unconsciously externalize his traumatized self onto a developing child’s personality. It then becomes the child’s task, says Volkan, to reverse the humiliation and feelings of helplessness experienced by his forebears. Such transgenerational transmissions are “not simply the result of handing down stories” (p. 44) says Volkan. Rather it may be more subtle, or even unconscious, “like psychological DNA planted in the personality of the next generation” (p. 44). “Patterns of behavior and nonverbal messages are intuited and acted upon accordingly” (p. 44).

According to Volkan (1997), the mental representations of trauma, and the mental defenses against pain and loss, may not always be in the forefront of a culture. Some members or even generations may attempt to erase the memory, perhaps because it is too painful or threatening. In this case, says Volkan, the memory of past trauma does not disappear, but remains “dormant,” “silently acknowledged” (p. 47) in unconscious forms, such as in literature or art. Volkan maintains, however, that memories of trauma and defenses against it will re-emerge powerfully under certain conditions. When such memories do emerge, Volkan further maintains, what happened in the past is held as if a current event. Volkan calls this “time collapse” (p. 35). He gives the example of a friend working on the Navajo reservation in New Mexico among the descendants of Navajos who survived the “Long Walk.” In 1864, after US soldiers rampaged through Navajo
communities, burning and destroying the natives’ homes, 8,000 Navajos were forced to walk 300 miles to Fort Sumner where they were held captive for 4 years. Several thousand Navajos died during the ordeal. Volkan’s friend writes that:

I thought they were talking about something that happened the day before. I was really taken aback when I realized they were talking about something that had happened more than 125 years ago. . . . To the Indians, the ‘Long Walk’ is as real as morning sunlight. (Volkan, 1997, p. 41)

Furthermore, says Volkan, this dynamic of time collapse means that memories—or shared mental representations—of traumatic events that happened long ago may be used to justify ethnic aggression in response to current events. In some cases, leaders may deliberately manipulate such memories to fuel a feeling of entitlement to revenge. As an example, Volkan describes how, following the collapse of the former Yugoslavia, Serbian leaders used the Battle of Kosovo – remembered by most Serbs as a traumatic and humiliating defeat at the hands of the Muslim Ottomans – to stir a feeling of entitlement to revenge among current Serb citizens. The memory incited deep passions despite fact that the Battle of Kosovo had happened 600 years ago.

While Volkan writes primarily about the experiences of large groups and their descendants, this paper argues that his theories are largely applicable to the experiences of individuals and their descendants as well. In addition, while Volkan speaks primarily about the traumatic effects of serious calamities, such as violent attacks on large groups of people, this paper also argues that similar traumatic effects can be triggered by much less severe woundings. Maalouf (2003), for example, argues that an individual who is bullied or humiliated because of some identifying characteristic (such as skin color or religious affiliation) may suffer “permanent injuries” (p. 25) from that trauma, forming
not only a fierce identification with that characteristic but also a long-lasting desire for revenge. Maalouf writes:

> It is these wounds that at every stage of life determine not only men's attitudes towards their affiliations but also the hierarchy that decides the relative importance of these ties. When someone has been bullied because of his religion, humiliated or mocked because of the color of his skin, his accent or shabby clothes, he will never forget it. (p. 26)

In her book, *The Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler (1997) also provides insights into the psychodynamics behind the construction of identity, or in her words, subject formation, and how those dynamics may be triggered by trauma. Most relevant to this paper, Butler describes (similarly to Volkan) how failing to fully mourn trauma can compel a subject to repeatedly re-stage and re-enact that trauma in what she calls “the traumatic repetition of what has been foreclosed” (p. 9). More specifically, Butler argues that one takes up a subject position – or identity – through a process of “passionate attachment” (p. 16) to an object or ideal external to oneself, followed by the subsequent denial or foreclosure of that object/ideal. Butler uses the image of a figure turning back on itself to describe the formulation of a subject, with the act of foreclosure or denial of one’s passionate attachment constituting the turn. Butler argues that the subject “turns back” (p. 3) from or “forecloses” (p. 9) its initial passionate attachment because “no subject, in the course of its formation, can ever afford to fully ‘see’ the object of its passionate attachment formed in dependency” (p. 8).

Butler (1997) is saying that people turn back, or deny, their initial identifications because they cannot afford to see (or perhaps, more correctly, *to feel*) their dependency upon – and vulnerability to – those objects of attachment. In Volkan’s (1997) conceptualization, this turning back is triggered by trauma, or psychological wounding
(which may be, after all, what one would experience if one ever saw the depth of one’s dependency and vulnerability), and that the moment of turning back is the moment where a subject (or large group) first takes up an identification with that trauma. In any case, similar to Volkan’s description of how members of a traumatized group perform and re-perform the roles of victim, victimizer and rescuer, Butler argues that this act of turning back casts the subject into a “traumatic repetition of what has been foreclosed” (p. 9).

The act of foreclosure, says Butler, compels the subject to stage and re-stage its initial attachment and the foreclosure of it. According to Butler, this is because the act of foreclosure sets up an ambivalence in the subject, an ambivalence the subject is compelled to act out. Desire, denied by the subject but still alive in the unconscious, seeks to dissolve or unravel the subject so that desire might not be denied. The subject, who depends on the foreclosure of desire for its existence, seeks to deny desire in order to persist.

Butler (1997) gives the example of a child, who initially attaches himself (identifies with) a parent, but later, when he feels rejected by that parent, claims, “I couldn’t possibly love such a person” (p. 8). According to Butler, this utterance “concedes the possibility it denies, establishing the ‘I’ as predicated upon that foreclosure, grounded in and by that firmly imagined impossibility” (p. 8). Such denial, however, does not destroy the initial desire/attachment. And so, says Butler, the subject “remains condemned to reenact that love unconsciously, repeatedly reliving and displacing that scandal, that impossibility, orchestrating that threat to one’s sense of ‘I’” (pp. 8-9). This tortuous dance of ambivalence – where the subject denies and yet unconsciously reenacts its original passionate attachment and the foreclosure of it – repeats itself over and over.
The subject, says Butler, is cast into melancholy, a state Butler describes as “the effect of unavowable loss” (p. 170) where “one denies the loss of an object (an other or an ideal) and refuses the task of grief” (p. 167).

Both Volkan (1997) and Butler (1997) argue that this traumatic staging and restaging of desire and loss – a drama that Volkan says can continue for generations and take the form of aggression against other large groups – is only broken through mourning. They define mourning as not only the admission of loss and the manifestation of grief, but also the expression of anger or rage over the loss. According to Volkan, “Human nature gives us a painful but ultimately effective way to let go of our previous attachments, to adjust internally to the absence of lost people or things and to get on with our lives” (p. 32). He calls this process “the work of mourning” (p. 32).

Implications of this theoretical discussion of identity and conflict on how to work with conflict involving identity

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives about identity and conflict have significant implications for how to work with conflict driven by identity and morality-based issues. To summarize, these theorists tell us that:

- conflict arises and/or escalates when people’s identities are threatened because people are generally not willing to “give up” or compromise their sense of identity;
- identity is best understood as identification with something, such as an ideal, a belief system, a group;
- every individual has multiple identifications which comprise their identity, but a
single identification may eclipse the others if one feels that that identification is under threat;

- identity operates across difference and exclusion and unavoidably involves marking a boundary between “I/we” and “you/they;”
- the boundary between “I/we” and “you/they” is particularly volatile when individuals or groups identify with worldviews that are incommensurate (that is, moral orders that can’t be mapped onto each other);
- the boundary between “I/we” and “you/them” is also particularly volatile when the identity of an individual or group is based – at least in part – on the foreclosure of an “other,” a foreclosure that has emerged due to the experience of unmourned trauma at the hand of that “other.”

These ideas help to explain why traditional interest-based conflict resolution strategies – which emphasize finding mutually acceptable/beneficial solutions through rational processes involving compromise and consensus – often backfire in conflict situations involving identity-based issues. It is not only, as Pearce and Littlejohn (1997) suggest, that disputants have “incommensurate grammars” (p. 55) so that “normal discourse” (p. 115) leads to misunderstanding and an escalation in conflict. It is also that disputants experience such efforts as asking them to give up, or substantially compromise, the identifications that comprise their identity, and thus they resist or refuse participation. Furthermore, it is because the emphasis on conscious rationality in such processes creates little or no opportunity for parties to address the underlying emotional experiences that may have caused them to turn back from or foreclose “the other” as well as their desire and willingness to be vulnerable.
Furthermore, these ideas suggest the need for new approaches to work with conflict driven by identity-based issues. More specifically, these ideas suggest the need for approaches which:

- do not require parties to give up or compromise the different identifications which define them, but rather help parties to hold and live with the differences between them in a less antagonistic (or in other words, a more agonistic) way;

- encourage parties to recognize and relate to the multiple allegiances that comprise their identity so that they can find empathy and avoid stereotypes with others who are different from them in many ways;

- allow parties to re-open and begin to heal the traumas which gave rise to the foreclosure of “the other” and which keeps them tied to “the other” in a perpetually conflicted way.

A major purpose of this paper is to identify discursive strategies that put these approaches into practice. Thus, several such strategies are identified and discussed in Chapter 8. Before turning to those strategies, however, this paper first examines how the just-discussed theories on identity and conflict – especially those theories focusing on incommensurate worldviews and the role of trauma in identity-driven conflict – play out in Salt Lake’s religious divide and the dispute over the city’s Main Street Plaza.
CHAPTER 5

THE RELIGIOUS DIVIDE AS AN IDENTITY-BASED CONFLICT

The morphology of the religious divide

The dispute over the Main Street Plaza cracked open the religious divide in Salt Lake City. The divide has long shaped the city’s morphology, however, and is reflected in its geographic, class, political and social landscapes.

Knowlton (2006) describes, for example, how Mormon and non-Mormon populations are “relatively segregated by residence” (p. 3), with the north end of Salt Lake Valley and a strip extending half-way down its center largely non-Mormon, and the rest of the valley, especially its broad south end, primarily Mormon. Similarly Knowlton describes a separation along economic and education lines, with most of the city’s poorer areas “heavily non-Mormon” (p. 3). While there is a highly educated class affiliated with the University that is non-Mormon, he writes, “the more educated a person is and the higher their income the more likely they are to be Mormon” (p. 3). Moreover, says Knowlton, while non-Mormons are more likely to study the arts, humanities and social sciences, Mormons are more likely to pursue technical fields and business management.

There is also some evidence that Mormons and non-Mormons are segregated, at least to some degree, in the work place as well. Knowlton (2006) points out that at least two of the largest employers in the state – the LDS Church and Brigham Young University – primarily employ members of the LDS Church. He also writes that there are
anecdotal reports that “many, if not most businesses display a pattern for preferential hiring of either Mormons or non-Mormons” (p. 4). Whether or not these claims are true, interviews for this paper suggested that at least some people do choose their work place so they can associate with – or avoid – LDS culture. One Mormon resident, for example, explained that she went to work for the LDS Church because she felt “discriminated against” at the bank where she was working. She described leaving an office party because liquor was being served and hearing “people make jokes and laugh” when she did so (PDG, #10). Similarly a non-Mormon resident who described “feeling shamed” for drinking coffee in her work cubicle, explained that she left a company where the employees were predominantly LDS because she felt socially isolated (personal interview, May 17, 2005). Another non-Mormon woman reported that both her Mormon and non-Mormon friends were aghast when she took a job with a company known to have a predominantly LDS workforce. She described their reaction as “‘Oh my gosh, what are you doing taking a job with a Mormon company?” (PDG, #13).

The religious divide cleaves the political landscape as well. Although the LDS Church publicly counsels its members to study the issues and vote their own conscience, the vast majority of Latter-day Saints are politically conservative and are members of the Republican party. In contrast, the Democratic party in Utah is composed primarily of non-LDS residents.

Where the religious divide is most evident, however – and arguably the most painful – is in the morphology of the city’s social landscape. Mormons and non-Mormons encounter and interact with each other daily in the public spaces of Salt Lake City. But as Knowlton (2006) writes, even if they are neighbors, “Mormons and non-
Mormons tend to live in separate social worlds . . . that have little interconnection” (p. 5).
For many residents, these separate social worlds begin in childhood, are reinforced during
dating years, and solidify in marriage and employment. Although there are certainly
exceptions, stories abound, for example, of Mormon and non-Mormon children attending
different play groups and birthday parties, dating only within their own Mormon or non-
Mormon circles, and marrying “their own kind.”

Similarly, many adults describe living lives that involve little real social
engagement across the Mormon/non-Mormon divide. One Mormon observed, for
example, “The people that I grew up with were LDS. The people I went to school with
were LDS. When I think back to my childhood neighborhood, I would say I did not know
a person who was not LDS” (personal interview, November 10, 2005). Another Mormon
observed:

Mormons are encouraged to marry within their faith so as teens we tend to
associate primarily with other Mormons. We believe everyone is a child
of God. But we don’t smoke or drink, and fear associating too much with
those who do. This city is like a mix of oil and water. Oil is attracted to
water. But water is more attracted to itself. (PDG, #1)

A non-Mormon who claimed not to experience the divide very much in her day-
to-day life, quickly qualified her own statement by noting, “But then, I hang out among
my own” (PDG, #1). Similarly, a non-Mormon who asserted that he has had “nothing but
good experiences with LDS people” since moving to Utah 15 years ago, subsequently
reflected that he lacks any real friends who are LDS (personal interview, November 19,
2005).

This divided social landscape is further reflected in the fact that if you ask almost
any nonhomogenous group in Salt Lake City to divide themselves – without speaking to
each other – into “us” and “them,” the divide will fall along the LDS/non-LDS line. It is also reflected in the fact that if you ask Salt Lake City residents what is the most common question asked (or perhaps assessed, even if it is unspoken) when people meet each other for the first time, many will tell you that it is “Are you LDS?” One life-long non-Mormon resident, for example, explained that when someone once asked her, “Are you from Longview?” she automatically answered, “No, I am not LDS,” because “my whole life when someone asked me if I was from a place with a name like that they were asking what ward I was in” (PDG, #10). She was stunned, she said, when her interlocutor explained that Longview was a swimming club.

Perspectives about the roots of the religious divide

Residents of Salt Lake City share many theories about the source or cause of the religious divide in their home town. Some residents say, for example, that the divide – consistent with the terminology used most often to describe it – has religious roots. Individuals making this argument often assert that the divide stems largely from the tendency of all religious institutions, especially those that are relatively young in age, to define strong boundaries between “us” and “them.” As one resident commented, “All religious institutions attempt to protect themselves by insulating and replicating their members. That’s what religions must do to survive” (PDG, #11). Individuals making the “religion is the root cause” argument also often claim that the theological doctrines of the LDS Church encourage Mormons to associate primarily with other Mormons, effectively separating Mormons from non-Mormons. Proponents of this position point to the LDS belief that family members will be re-united in heaven after death “for time and eternity” if they have lived a “worthy” life. Worthiness is evaluated against compliance with
certain standards, including remaining an active member of the LDS Church, obeying strictures against certain behaviors, and ideally, marrying another Latter-day Saint in the Temple. It is argued that these beliefs, and the practices that emerge from them, cause Mormons to associate primarily with other Mormons or with people whom they hope to convert. Finally, some non-Mormons argue that the claim of the LDS Church that it is "the one true church," especially when combined with the LDS belief in active proselytizing, is the key factor that drives a wedge between Mormons and non-Mormons. Some non-Mormons report avoiding interaction with members of the LDS Church because they feel offended or put down by this doctrine, or because they fear being proselytized. "The perception among non-LDS," commented one individual, "is that some LDS see them as commodities to convert first, rather than as potential friends" (PHW, November 12, 2005).

Other residents in Salt Lake City argue that the divide is largely cultural, that is, arising from different social norms and cultural practices rather than religious beliefs. Proponents of this viewpoint say that these cultural differences create a "space of separation" (Knowlton, 2001, p. 11) between Mormons and non-Mormons, a separation that is physical and temporal, as well as psychological. Many Mormons point out, for example, that on a simply pragmatic level, the day-to-day activities associated with Mormon life – church callings, family home evening, relief society – leave them little time to interact with people outside their own community. Speaking about the separate social lives of Mormon and non-Mormon children, one Mormon observed, "We have so many activities for kids – primary, weekly meetings. It is their social life. I can see how someone who is not LDS might feel rejected" (PDG, #13). Similarly, the LDS practice of
attending services and engaging in Sabbath activities for most of the day on Sundays further contributes to some physical separation between the two communities. Public events scheduled for weekends in Salt Lake City, for example, typically draw a heavily Mormon audience on Saturday and a heavily non-Mormon audience on Sunday (Knowlton, 2006). In addition, it is often observed that the Mormon disavowal of alcohol, coffee, and tobacco – substances commonly used in U.S. society – is part of the cultural divide between Mormons and non-Mormons in Salt Lake City. Many non-Mormons, for example, meet to chat in coffee houses or socialize after work in pubs or bars. These places are generally avoided by active Latter-day Saints. As one non-Mormon commented when explaining why he always felt a certain distance from Mormon acquaintances, "There is this sense that this is a person I can never get close to. Or it would take work. I mean, I am not going to have a marguerita and some chicken enchiladas with the Mormons I know, which is what I usually do with friends" (personal interview, November 19, 2005).

In addition, there are more subtle but still significant cultural differences in relation to dress, body decoration, and norms of speech that serve to both mark and reinforce a "space of separation" between Mormons and non-Mormons in Salt Lake City. Consistent with their view of "the body as a temple, where no profane thing should enter in," Mormons tend to dress modestly, maintain a "clean-cut" appearance, and not engage in tattoos or piercings (Knowlton, 2001, p. 11). Similarly, in line with the strong emphasis within LDS culture on respecting authority and collective harmony, most Mormons seek to avoid "'inappropriate' conversation, 'loud laughter', 'evil speaking' and behavior that might be considered contentious" (Knowlton, 2001, p. 11). While
many non-Mormons ascribe to similar norms, many others do not. In fact, for non-Mormon youth in particular, flamboyant attire, hairdos or body decoration, as well as critical or contentious speech, is often enjoyed as a means to express one’s individuality or independent agency. One Mormon woman explained:

The LDS Church does say to missionaries, cut your hair, look clean cut. They do make recommendations like that. It is like a company telling its employees, please cover your toes or wear nice clothes to work. But it’s true that growing up as a young child I might see someone with long hair or unusual dress and be afraid. Long hair meant hippies and drugs. (PDG, #12)

One non-Mormon noted, “There is this sense that I must always be on my toes to not offend people who are LDS. I must be careful with my speech, for example. It creates a certain distance between us” (personal interview, November 19, 2005).

Another theory is that the religious divide is grounded in Utah’s particular history. This view argues that because Mormons were a persecuted population who fled west to avoid being attacked and killed by critics, they have a strong sense of ownership over the Salt Lake Valley and an enduring guardedness against “outsiders.” The divide that exists between Mormons and non-Mormons today is seen as a consequence of that history. To Mormons, goes the argument, the geographic area known today as the state of Utah, and in particular the Salt Lake Valley, is a sacred place of refuge where they can practice their religion and flourish as a community of Saints without fear of persecution. Outsiders are inevitably seen, at least to some degree, as a potential threat to that safety. One Mormon explained:

History is very important. Mormons were a “marginalized group” historically. Their experience is one of being driven from their original communities, of moving from city to city seeking safety, of using up their resources, and then of coming to Zion – what has come to be for them a
place of “milk and honey.” Here they can have a religious experience without danger of persecution. (personal interview, November 10, 2005)

An ex-Mormon offered a similar perspective:

The stage was set for a divide in Utah from the beginning. . . . There is this feeling among many Mormons that this is our place. Mormons believe God set this land aside for Mormons. . . . It is “ours” because God gave it to us. This means that no human can undo that action because God promised this. In other words, no matter what the City says, this place is ours. Implicit in this is “And if you don’t like it, leave.” (personal interview, February 6, 2003)

Finally, many residents of Salt Lake City say the religious divide is, at its heart, political, that is, “it is all about power.” While there are slightly more non-Mormons than Mormons living within the boundaries of Salt Lake City, the overall population of the state is overwhelmingly Mormon. Furthermore, with the exception of the Salt Lake City mayor’s office, most of the state’s political offices are dominated by members of the LDS Church. At the time this paper is being written, for example, Utah’s two senators and three congressmen are LDS, as is the governor and much of his upper staff. Utah’s state legislature is also overwhelmingly Mormon.

In addition, the LDS Church has a significant presence in the larger business and civic community. It is a major property holder in Salt Lake City, especially in the central downtown business district. It is arguably the state’s largest employer, with 6,000 workers alone at its main office building downtown. It owns a number of other major institutions or business organizations, including Brigham Young University. Furthermore, it owns one of the state’s two daily newspapers, one of three network television stations, a public television station and a major radio station (Knowlton, 2006).

Furthermore, the church is a major structuring element in the city’s architecture and layout. The LDS Temple, a cathedral-like structure with towering spires, was built to
be the center of the city. The city’s streets and avenues were subsequently laid out and numbered in relation to the temple. This means that one’s home address - such as 350 South, 450 East - is defined in relation to the location of the temple. In addition, the LDS Church has divided its sprawling congregation into “stakes” and “wards,” each associated with a certain physical area in the city and each with its own “ward house.” These church-defined “wards” play a major role in defining what constitutes a community at the neighborhood level.

These factors combine to give the LDS Church what Knowlton (2006) calls “an almost transcendent presence” and “omnipresence in Utah life” (p. 4). Many residents, especially non-Mormons, say the religious divide stems from this overwhelming hegemonic presence of the church and the chafing of non-Mormons against it. A point of particular tension is the power of the LDS majority to pass laws that many non-Mormons see as imposing a LDS-defined morality on all individuals. Said one non-Mormon, “The LDS Church impacts all aspects of community - social, spiritual, and political. This is unintended, but as someone who is not LDS, I feel out of control” (PHW, November 12, 2005). Said another non-Mormon:

The thing that upsets me is when someone imposes their beliefs on my behaviors. For example, taking away the right to have an abortion. I’m not sure I would have one, but I don’t want someone else’s beliefs imposed on my life just because the majority holds those beliefs. (personal interview, May 15, 2005)

Said another non-Mormon “My opinion and point-of-view matter. I want to be heard and validated whether I am part of the majority or not” (PDG, #1).

Whatever theory or theories individuals subscribe to, most residents in Salt Lake City agree that, whatever its source, the religious divide is learned and passed on, not only
from one individual to the next, but also from one generation to the next. The president of the LDS Church, Gordon B. Hinkley, has actively encouraged members of the church to reach out to their non-Mormon neighbors. Still, some Mormons describe how the stories they grew up with left them wary of the non-Mormon other who could lead them astray or do them harm. One Mormon, for example, described how as a child, she and her siblings would playact the scenario of “evil outsiders” coming to kill Mormon prophet Joseph Smith (personal interview, November 10, 2005). Said another Mormon woman, “I’ve been thinking about the messages sent to me as a child. I did not know any non-Mormons in my neighborhood” (personal interview, November 10, 1005).

Prejudice against Mormons is similarly passed on through stories and jokes told among non-Mormons. As one relative newcomer to Salt Lake City said, “My Dad told me to say I was LDS or no one would rent to me” (PDG, #10). Said another woman who moved into the community, “I learned to hate Mormons. This community teaches you that” (personal interview, June 1, 2006).

This paper takes the view that all these theories about the source of the religious divide have merit. Without question, there are religious, cultural, historical and political factors which have both created the divide and perpetuate it. Without seeking to refute any of these theories, this paper offers an additional perspective – a perspective that this author believes helps to better explain why the divide is at times so incendiary, easily exacerbated, intractable and emotional. It is also a perspective that offers new ways to think about the divide, and thus new ideas about how to work with it.
The religious divide as an identity-based conflict

One might think that the dispute over the Main Street Plaza should have been resolvable through skillful mediation. On one level, the dispute can be seen as a conflict between two interests: those who want to protect the tranquility of the plaza because of its religious significance to the LDS Church and thus advocate for retaining restrictions on conduct; and those who want to preserve the right to public access across the plaza and the constitutional right of free speech that accompanies such access and thus advocate for retention of the right-of-way easement without restrictions. Many people holding these positions, however, had empathy for the concerns of the other side. Most people can understand, and even empathize with, the desire to safeguard those places which represent “sacred ground” to a social group. Similarly, most people respect and value the protection of the First Amendment right to free speech.

Why then did the dispute over Main Street become so contentious in Salt Lake City? Why did well-intentioned efforts to resolve the contention – such as Mayor Anderson’s proposal to confine the “time, place and manner” of protest activities through carefully crafted regulations or his later proposal to relinquish the easement in exchange for the construction of a “Unity Center” elsewhere – fail to resolve the issue for many, and at least for some citizens, exacerbate it? Why did the efforts to publicly talk about the plaza dispute (in the public hearings scheduled around the city) only seem to re-enact and deepen the divide between Mormons and non-Mormons?

This paper argues that the answers to these questions can be found – at least to a substantial degree – in the nature of the conflict itself. More specifically, this paper argues that the dispute over the Main Street Plaza – and the religious divide that underlies
it is best understood as a conflict over identity. It asserts that the plaza dispute and the religious divide represent a clash between incommensurate worldviews, or moral orders, and the people who identify with those worldviews/moral orders. In addition, it maintains that these conflicts are exacerbated by the widespread foreclosure of “the other,” a foreclosure that has emerged because of identification with unmourned trauma.

The religious divide as a conflict emerging from identification with incommensurate worldviews

As noted earlier, conflict tends to emerge when people feel that their identity is threatened. Furthermore, because identity unavoidably involves – consciously or unconsciously – identification with a particular ontology (a sense of what is real or true), epistemology (a way of knowing what is true) and axiology (a sense of what is valuable and important), conflict often emerges when people perceive others as challenging their way of knowing, understanding and living their values in the world.

Perhaps because of its very physicality, the Main Street Plaza became a symbol for both Mormons and non-Mormons of the beliefs and values – or worldviews and moral orders – that define who they are. The dispute over the plaza, thus, became a dispute over whose identity would be privileged, and whose would be marginalized. And because the worldviews of the two sides were in many ways incommensurate, the struggle over the Main Street Plaza was for many a fight for their very right to exist. As a columnist for the Deseret News wrote about the plaza, “This isn’t a case of ‘You say ‘po-TAY-to’ and I say ‘po-TAH-to.’ It’s more like ‘you say rutabaga,’ and ‘I say artichoke.’ It’s shaping up as an impossible situation” (Johnston, 2003, November 23).
The existence of incommensurate worldviews can be seen in the narratives told by Mormons and non-Mormons to describe the Main Street Plaza dispute. In Docherty's (2001) words, the presence of incommensurate worldviews is revealed by how the two sides “appear to be speaking different languages and occupying different realities” (p. 11). In Pearce and Littlejohn’s words, incommensurability is revealed when two narratives reflect differences in “the most fundamental and cherished assumptions” each group makes about “how to order . . . our own lives and our lives together in this society” (Hunter as cited in Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997, p. 49).

For most Mormons, the story of the Main Street Plaza is embedded in a much larger story, a story about Mormon history and identity. This is a narrative about creating a safe place—a haven in a hostile world—where members of the LDS faith can practice their religion without ridicule or persecution, and where the community of faithful can flourish and prosper. In this story, Salt Lake City is not just a city, a place of social, economic and political transactions. Salt Lake City is the place, founded and developed by Mormons, where they can practice their religion freely, without interference by others and without fear of reprisal. The Main Street Plaza is not just a piece of open space in the heart of downtown. It is a gift to the community. It is holy ground, situated on the doorstep of the community’s most sacred temple.

As one member of the LDS Church wrote to the Salt Lake Tribune:

We pose a very significant question when we sing the LDS hymn, “Where Can I Turn for Peace?” The answer can be difficult to find. For a long time, the answer has been Salt Lake valley. We love Salt Lake City—clean, safe and friendly, in summary, one of our favorite places. Loving the city the way we do, we thrilled to see the gift the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints gave the city and its visitors in the plaza between Temple Square and the Joseph Smith Memorial Building. It's
been an oasis of peace in the city, a place where families can gather and enjoy the city and one another. (Letter-to-the-Editor, 2002, October 16)

In this story, the idea that certain kinds of conduct, dress and speech would be inappropriate and thus restricted on the plaza is obvious, so obvious it might be taken for granted. And from within this story, objections to those restrictions would be seen as almost incomprehensible. Describing Temple Square and the plaza at Christmas, a member of the LDS Church said at a public hearing:

> with the lights, all the people there from every religion, every culture, every place, loving what they were seeing, enjoying it with their families. It was a beautiful sight. How could we ever get that if the church had not stepped forward. As I said before, they’ve done more for this community than any church in any city or any state that I’m aware of. I think we should be proud of what they’ve done . . . . And I saw those people protesting, and I thought, my goodness, to do what they did in our community, is really very difficult for me to understand. (Q&A transcript, 2003)

Indeed, from within this story, objections to restrictions on conduct, dress and behavior might be seen not as a desire for self-expression, but as an insult, a protest against, or even an assault on the LDS Church. Certainly, such objections would be seen as repudiation of what the church holds most dear – the creation of a safe haven where the LDS religion can be practiced without persecution. As Gordon Hinkley, President of the LDS Church, wrote “Unfortunately, some have since felt that this place of peace should be a place of protest, that this island of quiet beauty should be used for confrontational and noisy demonstrations [italics added]” (Hinkley, 2002). A member of the LDS Church expressed a similar sentiment when she wrote the Salt Lake Tribune:

> With all the plazas and parks in town, you can’t tell me there isn’t someplace else for the planned holiday wine and cheese tasting party other than at the base of the Salt Lake Temple. I’m sorry, I just don’t believe it’s an innocent coincidence. It is a show of disrespect for the people and values of the LDS Church. (Wilson, 2003)
The stories told by many non-Mormons about the Main Street Plaza dispute are also part of a larger narrative that defines a sense of identity. This is a narrative, however, about diversity and democracy. In this story, cities – including Salt Lake City – are seen as places where diversity, and the various faces of its individual expression, are celebrated. Furthermore, cities are seen as places where a multiplicity of cultures co-exist side by side, and where all customs, beliefs and ways of dressing are not only tolerated, but promoted. In this story, Main Street is the symbolic and physical center of such diversity. It is the quintessential public space, a place where the public – with all its varied faces of individual expression – meets itself, and in the practice of this meeting, creates democracy.

As the ACLU wrote in a press release:

Main Street is not only a traditional public forum entitled to the highest degree of First Amendment protections, [but] it is also a symbol of community central to the “marketplace of ideas” that has played such a critical role in our nation’s history. (ACLU, 2001, June 4)

In this story, the sale of Main Street to the LDS Church for the purpose of constructing a privately owned ecclesiastical plaza is not seen as a gift to the community. Rather, it is seen as the taking of public space and as an act that diminishes democracy.

As the ACLU wrote in a brief to the court:

If the rich or powerful or orthodox can appropriate and monopolize the paradigm of the ‘marketplace of ideas’ that Main Street represents – that anyone, rich or poor, powerful or downtrodden, believer or non-believer, should have a voice and a platform to debate the great issues of the day – then freedom of expression is gravely at risk for all of us. (First Unitarian Church, 2000)

Similarly, as one non-Mormon wrote the Salt Lake Tribune:

In most cities and towns, the term ‘Main Street’ denotes the center, or heart, of the city. To bystanders, like myself, purchasing Main Street
appears to be a subtle act for control of the city center, a monopoly of sorts. I doubt if any other denomination could have bought Main Street so quickly, effortlessly or at all. Hence, the chasm, and the roots of the Main Street controversy. (Clark, 2000, January 23)

Furthermore, from within this story, restrictions on certain forms of speech, dress and behavior on the plaza are not understood as appropriate measures necessary to ensure respectful behavior on holy ground. They are seen as an attack on diversity, and as an effort to exclude or banish people who are different from the majority. Reverend Tom Goldsmith of the First Unitarian Church wrote:

People of many faiths, backgrounds, and experience contributed to the building of this great city, and contribute today to its growing diversity. Now that the city has sold Main Street and allowed the new owners to silence and banish anyone who might offer an alternative voice or experience, we feel as though we are welcome here so long as we are neither seen or heard. (ACLU, 2001, June 4)

The existence of incommensurate worldviews can also be seen in the lack of shared norms between Mormons and non-Mormons for “naming” or “framing” the dispute over Main Street Plaza. Mormons and non-Mormons not only differed in how they viewed the dispute and what they thought was an appropriate resolution. They also disagreed about what social norms had been breached in the decision making process. In addition, they disagreed about what was the best way to go about seeking resolution of that breach. These differences reflect the divergent worldviews held by each side. As Docherty (2001) writes, “When communities telling different worldmaking stories meet, they lack a common authoritative base from which to identify a breach of norms. Naming a conflict becomes problematic” (p. 63).

A major issue for many non-Mormons objecting to the sale of Main Street to the LDS Church, for example, focused on how the decision was made. These citizens
complained that the sale proposal was developed by city and church authorities who met “behind closed doors” without adequate opportunity for public involvement or input. Moreover, they asserted, the proposal was already a “done deal” when it was announced. There was no real chance to debate the proposal on its merits; subsequent meetings with the public were only “public relations.” Similarly, many non-Mormons objecting to the imposition of behavioral restrictions on plaza visitors objected to how the decision to allow restrictions was made. These citizens complained that the LDS Church revealed its intention to impose such restrictions only after the city held public meetings on the proposed sale of Main Street and only after the Planning Commission had signed off on the deal. Again, citizens asserted that this was a breach of democratic norms. The opportunity for individuals to have a voice, or say, in what city officials decided was inappropriately usurped.

In contrast, most Mormons expressed no problem with how these decisions were made. Rather, they asserted, the LDS Church had acquired the plaza after fair and legitimate negotiations between church and city leaders. The public had been given ample opportunity to learn about the proposal through public meetings; the city council had voted to approve the sale understanding that restrictions would be imposed. Most Mormons were baffled – or made suspicious – by claims that the decision making process had not adequately allowed public debate. “I don’t understand why everyone is mad at us,” said one Mormon (PDG, #10). “The lawsuit (challenging the plaza sale) was simply an attack on the church,” said another. “It was not about freedom of speech” (PDG, #10).

This inability to agree on whether and what social norms had been breached during the decision-making process on the plaza was echoed in the parties’ inability to
agree on how to approach addressing whatever breach had occurred. For the most part, Mormons felt repudiated by the mayor’s proposal that both sides negotiate “time, place and manner” restrictions that would protect First Amendment free speech rights while respecting the plaza’s religious significance. On the other hand, many non-Mormons felt renounced by the mayor’s “peace proposal” which abandoned the city’s pedestrian right-of-way across the plaza in exchange for the promised construction of a “Unity Center” elsewhere in the city.

Perhaps more telling, Mormons and non-Mormons tended to promote two distinctly different approaches to reconciliation when the mayor later formed an advisory committee to suggest initiatives that might bridge the religious divide. Most Mormons suggested social gatherings where Mormons and non-Mormons could come together in harmony to discover “what we have in common” and “what unites us.” In contrast, most non-Mormons, emphasized the need to “acknowledge our differences and learn to respect them.” One Mormon commented, for example, “I am concerned that there is not enough friendliness and sense of commonality. I wish we could find ways to come together more. We need to raise our community spirit” (PAC, June 2, 2004). In contrast, a non-Mormon suggested, “We need to celebrate difference” (PAC, June 2, 2004). When asked “What would a successful initiative to bridge the religious divide look like?,” a Mormon said “a non-Mormon coming to my house for dinner” (PAC, June 2, 2004). A non-Mormon piped up, “A new state legislature” (PAC, June 2, 2004).

Embedded in these divergent narratives and social norms are different epistemologies and ontologies, that is, different ways of understanding and of being in the world. Listen to the narratives and norms of Mormons, for example, and you will hear an
emphasis on: the collective “we” of community; the value of social harmony; deference
to hierarchical authority; and a belief in universal truths. In contrast, listen in to the
narratives and norms of most non-Mormons and you will hear a stress on: the
independent “I” of individuality; the value of dissension; a demand for personal
autonomy; and a belief in multiple perspectives on truth. While the worldview of each
community – and of any particular individual – is obviously a lot more complex than this
simple summary, these themes are re-occurring and often commented on by both
Mormons and non-Mormons. Furthermore, while these different worldviews may not
fully exclude each other, their key elements are incommensurate. They don’t “map onto”
each other. Rather, they represent divergent frameworks for making sense of and acting
in the world. As a result, when people operating within these different worldviewing
frameworks interact, they can easily feel unacknowledged, ignored or even repudiated by
each other. More seriously, they can feel that the beliefs and values that define who they
are in the world are under attack. Consequently, conflicts over what may seem to be
simple matters can become conflicts over one’s very right – or ability – to exist.

Knowlton’s (2006) theory that Mormons and non-Mormons have different
structures of self provides a useful way to look more closely at the divergent worldviews
of Mormons and non-Mormons and how the incommensurability of these worldviews
leads to conflict. In laying out his theory, Knowlton asserts an important caveat, one that
is applicable to this paper’s discussion of worldviews as well. Knowlton emphasizes that
his descriptions of Mormon and non-Mormon structures of self are “ideal types” which
emphasize “identifiable points” while “in reality there is much variation” (p. 169). The
variation, however, is “variation on these themes, rather than variation of type” (p. 169).
Knowlton (2006) argues that the “dominant American model” (p. 173) of self is strongly influenced by “the norms of individualism from national culture” (p. 172). In this model, the self is seen as an autonomous atom “in a society composed of relations among autonomous units” (p. 174). The self is understood as “agentive, self-determining, and self-contained” (p. 176). The role of the ego is emphasized; it is considered the critical component of self that makes one a “willing, moral agent” (p. 173). In contrast, says Knowlton, Mormons have “a divergent kind of self from the dominant individualism typical of U.S. society” (Knowlton, 2001, p. 4). For the “typical Mormon,” “individuality is constrained by the strong and primary force of the ‘Church’ as a symbol within themselves” (p. 3). According to Knowlton, “this sets many LDS apart from their fellows in the individualist US and perhaps other countries. The Church often occupies a place in their inner and outer lives that is highly unusual and difficult to comprehend for their non-Mormon peers” (p. 3). More specifically, Knowlton argues that the “ideal Mormon self” is a “tripartate, collectivist self” (Knowlton, 2006, p. 175) where the church and spirit, as well as the ego, comprise the internal components of the psyche. Important to understanding this model, stresses Knowlton, is the fact that “two of these components exist not only within individual psyches, but are located externally in complex social realities” (p. 175). Although this can “produce marvelously functional persons with a strong spiritual sensitivity as well as an ethos and psychology of selflessness in community service,” it also makes it “almost impossible for a person to ever develop a bounded, internally integrated self” (pp. 20-21).

Knowlton (2006) explains that for Mormons, the LDS Church is not only a set of beliefs, but also a social organization and a leadership hierarchy. The hierarchy includes
a prophet at the top who is “defined as the mouthpiece of God” (p. 8) and descends to
include General Authorities and other leadership positions. For the ideal Mormon self,
says Knowlton, the church is not an object outside of oneself over which the self can have
control. Rather it is an integral “component of the self that is ontologically prior to the
ego” (p. 11). This means that for Latter-day Saints, “the LDS Church” is an integral part
of “who I am.” For many Mormons, says Knowlton, this feeling is so strong “that it
seems to them that without the Church they might cease to exist” (Knowlton, 2001, p. 3).
As one Mormon said, for example, in explaining her relationship to the church, “My
religion is what I am. It is so deep in my heart. It is the key to my heart” (PDG, #13).

The second component in Knowlton’s “tripartate Mormon self” is Spirit, meaning
the Spirit of God. Ideally, writes Knowlton (2006), Mormons increasingly experience
the presence of Spirit within them as they “grow in religious merit” until Spirit and the
person “are of one heart” (p. 170). For the ideal Mormon self, the Spirit of God becomes
“a constant presence guiding and directing the person in terms of what actions they
should take” (p. 170). Knowlton emphasizes the importance of this sense of Spirit to
Mormons. “The experience of the Holy Ghost, or Spirit,” he writes, “is not an
intellectual experience, per se, but something embodied and felt deeply within one”
(Knowlton, 2001, p. 8). He contends that “it would be hard to overemphasize the
importance” for Mormons of maintaining a sense of Spirit, asserting that “it becomes a
primary motivation of active Mormons” to do so (p. 8).

Knowlton further explains that the sense of Spirit draws Mormons together into a
common unity – the social body of the church – thus reinforcing a Mormon’s sense of self
as an integration of individual ego, Spirit and church. Knowlton writes:
not only is the Holy Ghost a gift that dwells inside them, it also mitigates the boundaries of the body and draws people together into a common body, where . . . this body is also the Church . . . . The idea is not simply metaphor, but is something lived and felt. People orient their lives towards making that experience ever more tangible until it ideally encompasses their entire existence. (p. 9)

For Mormons, Knowlton says, this “unity in a common body” is “about being ‘one,’ of ‘one heart and mind’” (pp. 9-10) – a oneness that encompasses the individual, the LDS Church and the Spirit of God. He writes:

Individual hearts and minds are realized, exalted, and subsumed within the single heart and mind of the body of the Church sanctified by the Holy Ghost, thereby making them one with God . . . . There is hardly anything more sublime in the experience of the Mormon world than that oneness . . . . It is a very, very powerful physical and emotional experience for the believing Latter-day Saint. (p. 10)

The existence of church and Spirit as internal psychic components in the ideal Mormon self creates a different role for the ego (the third component in the Mormon triparate self) than that normally assumed for the “self of modal America” (Knowlton, 2006, p. 164). Mormon teachings emphasize individual agency; there is a strong belief that individuals have the power to choose their own path in life. According to Knowlton (2006), however, the ideal Mormon self does not place the desires of one’s individual ego above the church and spirit. Rather, the ideal relationship is one of harmony, with the demands of ego in line with the “whisperings” of Spirit and the directives of church authorities. There is “a certain suspicion of the ego in Mormon practices of self; it cannot be trusted,” writes Knowlton (p. 170). “It must always be evaluated to see that it conforms with the other two components of self, components understood to be located outside the individual’s control” (p. 170).
Knowlton (2006) argues that the "modal American form of the agentive, self
determining, and self-contained self" (p. 176) and the LDS tripartate self are
"noncommensurate, and have different needs and dynamics" (p. 175). Moreover, making
an argument similar to the one presented in this paper, Knowlton contends that "a good
part of the conflict and tension" (p. 174) between Mormons and non-Mormons arises
from the incommensurability of these "differently structured selves" (p. 174) when they
meet in social interaction. Knowlton writes:

engagements among differently formed selves can lead to a feeling of
mutual meconnaisance and denial of critical portions of the selves
involved, due to the non-commensurability of the forms. In the social
reality in which these selves operate it is difficult for people to recognize
the different structural dilemmas and instead they feel caught in an
emotionally charged, argumentative, and often prejudicial and dismissive
field of religious tension. (p. 176)

This paper describes the divide between Mormons and non-Mormons as a clash of
incommensurate worldviews, while Knowlton (2006) describes it as the meconnaisance
of "differently structured selves" (p. 176). Both analyses, however, make the same
critical observation; because Mormons and non-Mormons have incommensurate ways of
understanding and being in the world, both feel that their very identity – who they are,
how they live their values, how they relate with others – is not validated or valued by the
other. Rather, both feel judged, dismissed and disrespected by the other. Or, said another
way, both communities feel that there is no place for them in the other’s world. Each side
often feels not only unseen, but also unwelcome. Worse, many experience the other as
threatening their ability to exist. Some even feel that the presence of the other threatens
to annihilate who they are and what they believe in. As one Mormon said:

We came here because we were persecuted. And we had certain values.
And now the tables are turning as a large influx of people are coming in.
We fear we will not have the city we wanted and we developed... people come here and try to turn the culture upside down. It may sound like I am saying if you don’t like it, leave. That’s the last thing I want to say. But it is like we came here and have certain values and now people are coming and trying to turn that upside down. (PDG, #1)

Similarly, as a non-Mormon said about living and working in a predominantly Mormon community, “It’s not just that I feel marginalized. I feel erased” (personal interview, January 15, 2005).

In Salt Lake City, this sense – experienced by both Mormons and non-Mormons – that the other disrespects or even threatens one’s very way of being is most visible in public debates over a number of social issues, such as the management of liquor, the role of women, or whether homosexuals may legally marry or adopt children. In each of these examples, the disputing sides tend to feel that the other is challenging not just how they behave, but their very identity -- who they are, and even their right to exist. In an exchange about homosexuality, for example, one Mormon explained, “Mormons feel the traditional family is under attack. They are holding onto a way of life that they believe is the right way of life and they fear that way of life will be annihilated if homosexuality is legally condoned” (personal interview, March 7, 2005). A non-Mormon responded, “It is my gay son who is in the gas chamber. It is my son who is being annihilated” (personal interview, March 7, 2005).

The sense of being dismissed or erased by the other, however, is also experienced by many Mormons and non-Mormons in daily discourse. When asked how they personally experience the religious divide in their own day-to-day lives, for example, many Mormons in Salt Lake City say they feel “stereotyped” or “pigeon-holed” by non-Mormons who make “assumptions” about them “just because they are Mormon” and who
seem unable or unwilling to see and know them for who they really are. Similarly, many non-Mormons complain that Mormons make false judgments about who they are and about the morality of their behavior based simply on the knowledge that they are not members of the LDS Church. This paper contends, however, that this sense of mutual disrespect and disregard arises from more than a human tendency to stereotype. Rather, this paper argues that Mormons and non-Mormons feel pigeon-holed, disrespected and disregarded by each other because members of each community — generally speaking — operate within divergent worldviews. As a result, each side feels easily misunderstood, dismissed and renounced by the other. As Pearce and Littlejohn (1997) write:

> every moral tradition holds certain images or order inviolate. Any action that threatens the concept of order within the tradition will be seen as an abomination, and what is a perfectly acceptable act within one tradition can be [seen as] an abomination in another. (p. 51)

Some key examples of how the worldviews of Mormons and non-Mormons clash and foster a sense of disrespect and disregard between the two communities are provided by looking at the themes embedded in each communities’ narratives and norms.

**The independent “I” of individuality and the collective “we” of community**

As noted earlier, the modal self of America emphasizes individualism, autonomy and self-determination. While strong ties with family or some larger community are honored, one’s identity is usually most strongly defined through the “I” of what “I” do, where “I” live, what “I” believe. In contrast, a number of anthropologists who have studied Mormon culture argue that Mormon identity tends to be more closely tied to the “we” of their religious community. As noted earlier, for example, Knowlton (2001) argues that the “typical Mormon” has a “divergent kind of self from the dominant
individualism typical of US society” (p. 4) and that for Mormons, “individuality is constrained by the strong and primary force of the ‘Church’ as a symbol within themselves” (p. 3). Mormons believe, says Knowlton, that an emphasis on ego or individualism – what in Mormon parlance might be called selfishness – can cause the feeling of Spirit within one to wither. Thus, the ideal of Mormon behavior is to be selfless, or egoless, and to avoid standing out. “Instead of celebrating individuality,” explains Knowlton (2006), “it is knocked down” within Mormon culture, “like the Japanese parable that if a nail stands up, pound it down” (p. 174). This does not mean Mormons do not acknowledge individual ego and value individual agency. Rather, it means that, ideally, “one does not place the ego above the Church and the Spirit” (p. 170). Thus, the “I” and the “we” become largely conflated, as an individual ideally harmonizes church, spirit and individual ego. Knowlton (2001) quotes one church authority, for example, encouraging members to “imagine a world in which we would replace I as the dominant pronoun” (p. 14).

Similarly, Davies (2000) describes the emphasis in Mormon culture on the individual as a member of the community rather than as an autonomous unit. Davies stresses that the “very notion of exclusive individualism” is “quite false within Mormonism,” noting that “the entire cosmology and philosophical anthropology of Mormonism is social and relational” (p. 156). In describing the traditional Mormon practice of raising the right hand with the flat palm facing forwards to indicate agreement with a proposal made by church leaders, Davies says, “Though the individual is a single person, he or she must also act as a member of that community and must do so visibly” (p. 131). Davies also cites the example of former President Spencer Kimball counseling
members of the LDS Church to eliminate mannerisms that accentuate their individuality (like laughing raucously or wearing too much make-up) until “you are a very normal person” (p. 126). “This idea of being ‘a very normal person,’” writes Davies, “reflected the preferred image of a member of an extensive group in which individuals do not stand out against others” (p. 126).

These divergent ways of holding the relationship between “I” and “we” in identity create a disjunction between Mormons and non-Mormons, a disjunction that often leaves each side feeling misunderstood, unacknowledged and even attacked by the other. For non-Mormons operating within a worldview that emphasizes individualism, for example, the emphasis on “we” in LDS identity may be troubling and even seem “un-American.” From this perspective, Mormonism looks like a cult, where church leaders have inordinate power which denies individuals their individuality. Mormons may appear “sheeplike,” lacking independent agency. One non-Mormon reflected this view, for example, when commenting that “Mormons have a confused notion of democracy” (personal interview, February 6, 2003).

Similarly, for Mormons operating within a worldview that emphasizes the “we” of community, the emphasis on “I” in the dominant American model of self can seem morally wrong. From this perspective, individualism looks like selfishness, a selfishness that cannot only separate the individual from the voice of the Spirit but also harm the well-being of the larger community infused with that Spirit.

When Mormons and non-Mormons interact across this disjuncture between their worldviews, they both can end up feeling disrespected and denigrated by the other. As Knowlton (2006) writes, “The unwillingness and indeed inability of outsiders to
recognize and value the power of the Church as a formative, internal part of the self is perceived as dismissive and disrespectful by Latter-day Saints” (p. 174). On the other hand, the Mormon tendency to see expressions of individual ego as selfishness leave many non-Mormons feeling unfairly judged as immoral.

Agency as the exercise of personal autonomy and agency as the choice to obey

American culture, and perhaps in particular the culture of the American West, celebrate notions of personal autonomy and self-determination. The idea of individual agency is emphasized; freedom is defined as one’s ability to exercise individual agency. There is a general suspicion of powerful external authorities, especially any authority that is perceived as treading on an individual’s ability to make his or her own, independent choices.

In contrast to these norms – at least superficially – is the emphasis on obedience in the Mormon worldview. Davies (2000) writes that obedience is not only a “distinctive feature of LDS cultural life” (p. 6), but also a “prime moral value of Mormonism” (p. 141). According to Davies, the value placed on obedience is driven by the “assumption that divine guidance given to the superior leadership will have led them to proposals that are true and proper” (p. 162). Similarly, Knowlton (2001) observes that for Mormons “the good person and the person worthy of the Holy Ghost is obedient to the will of God, to the promptings of the Spirit, and to ‘priesthood’ authorities” (p. 13). Mormons believe “one should learn to sacrifice his own desire, her own will, his own self,” says Knowlton, “when it diverges” from these sources of guidance (p. 13).
It is important to note, however, that within Mormon thought, the practice of obedience is not seen as abandoning one's will. Rather, it is seen as a powerful expression of what Mormons call free agency. As Davies (2000) explains, Mormonism gives more priority to the image of Christ in Gethsemane than to Christ on the Cross, reflecting "the LDS scheme of voluntary commitment and agency that runs through Mormon thought" (p. 49). In other words, for Mormons, to obey church teachings is to do as Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane. It is a deliberate exercise of their free agency, a voluntary choice to follow the will of God. As Davies writes, this makes the notion of obedience and wisdom analytically slightly paradoxical within Mormonism. Davies points out that "The call to obedience is balanced by formal exhortation to explore all knowledge" (p. 167). At the same time, Davies writes, the LDS Church "retains the right to assert and affirm key truths from the central leadership positions. Wisdom, in effect, comes to be a personal disposition to grasp as true that which the Church teaches as true" (p. 35).

These divergent ways of understanding agency and of relating to external authority also create a rupture between Mormons and non-Mormons in Salt Lake City. For non-Mormons operating within a worldview that celebrates agency as an exercise of personal autonomy, the Mormon practice of obedience is often seen as subservience. Mormons are perceived as surrendering their agency to the church. Their decision to follow church teachings appears to be "mindless" or "blind" obedience. On the other hand, for Mormons operating within a worldview that understands obedience as perhaps the most powerful expression of free agency, these criticisms reflect not only ignorance but arrogance. Again, each side ends up feeling dismissed and denigrated by the other.
An exchange of letters in the Salt Lake Tribune captures this dynamic. In a letter titled “Life on Planet Earth,” a non-Mormon complains that the newspaper sacrifices in-depth reporting on national issues for coverage of local, often LDS-related news, asserting that the paper does this because most Mormons lack the ability or desire to think critically or independently. The author writes, “Sadly, on Planet Utah, if you are LDS, critical thinking and evaluation of facts are way down on the list of how to approach life on Planet Earth” (White, 2006). A Mormon fires back, asserting that once again, non-Mormons just do not get it. The Mormon author writes that the earlier writer:

makes the common, and erroneous, assumption that thinking critically and having faith are mutually exclusive. . . . I am LDS, but my church did not tell me how to vote. My leaders encouraged me to study the issues and candidates carefully and vote my conscience, which I did. I resent the implication . . . that someone who listens to religious counsel can’t also think for herself or himself. (Carter, 2006)

The value of contention and the value of social harmony

Dissension is generally recognized in American culture as a critical part of democracy. The opportunity for members of the public to question, debate and challenge proposals put forth by their elected and appointed leaders is built into most decision making processes. Diversity is considered an asset; the best solutions to public problems are often believed to emerge from the clash of ideas.

While the LDS Church embraces the U.S. Constitution as a divinely inspired document and encourages its members to participate as engaged citizens in local democratic processes, dissension is discouraged within the Mormon community itself. Rather, consistent with the LDS Church’s emphasis on selflessness, control over self, obedience, and deep respect for those holding positions of both church and civil authority,
harmony is valued. Harmony does not mean the absence of internal struggle or even external conflict. It does not mean, however, the avoidance of contentious behavior. Davies (2000), for example, depicts the *habitus* – or preferred and prevailing mood – of Mormon culture as “self reflective control, combined with a joyous lightness of spirit” (p. 128). In describing Mormon *habitus*, Davies highlights a variety of gestures, including: the wearing of temple garments; the giving of testimony in “an emotion-laden yet calmly controlled fashion” (p. 119); the practice of voting on proposals made by church authorities by raising the right hand (silently, and without public debate); and the avoidance of loud or raucous laughter. All these gestures embody an individual living out his or her place in the community in harmony with others. Similarly, Knowlton (2001) explains that harmony is understood to signify the presence of Spirit while contention is seen as the work of the devil. Knowlton writes:

> In the missionary discussions,” writes Knowlton, “LDS proselyters teach their ‘investigators’ that a ‘warm peaceful feeling’ is the Spirit of God moving within them. . . . The good Latter-day Saint should walk with the Spirit all the time. His or her feelings should be conducive to welcoming the Holy Ghost. Other feelings, such as strong ones like rage, hatred, and even ecstasy are seen as dangerous and wrong, perhaps of Satan. (pp. 16-17)

While there are a few social organizations, such as Sunstone, which seek to provide a space where Mormons can think and speak critically about their beliefs, dissonance is discouraged within traditional forums. As Knowlton (2006) writes, dissonance is seen as developing “from sin, i.e. from not complying with Mormon sanctioned behavior” and there are “a number of images to describe this state and none are positive. There are rebels, jack Mormons, dissidents, and so on” (p. 169).
These divergent perspectives on the role of dissension often leave Mormons and non-Mormons feeling that there is little space for them to stand in the other’s world or feeling attacked by the other. For non-Mormons operating within a worldview that values the role of dissension, Mormon culture can seem frustratingly “nice” and devoid of authentic emotional exchange. As one ex-Mormon complained, “I can’t talk to my mother. I can’t discuss anything unless it’s in a positive vein. I can’t bring up questions. I am immediately shut down. It’s tyranny, not to bring up anything that is seen as derogatory or a question” (PDG, #3). Said another ex-Mormon whose children were still active LDS members, “We can’t talk about anything with them because it is too upsetting. If we say anything about religion or politics, everything closes up” (PDG, #6).

For Mormons operating within a worldview that esteems harmony, acts of public criticism or challenge — especially when they are or appear to be targeted at the LDS Church — are experienced not only as hurtful, but also as deliberately offensive. Many Mormons, for example, felt that the lawsuit challenging the sale of Main Street to the LDS Church was “an attack” on Mormons and were deeply hurt by it.

Multiple perspectives on truth and a belief in universal truth

One of the issues that most frequently divided Mormons and non-Mormons in the Bridging the Religious Divide dialogue groups was a belief in universal truth versus a belief that there are multiple perspectives on truth. In fact, a frequent focus of discussions was the Mormon claim that the LDS Church is the “one true church” and the Mormon practice of proselytizing to that end. The non-Mormons participating in the dialogue groups had a diversity of spiritual orientations, including Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, Jewish, Pagan, Buddhist, agnostic and atheist. For the most part, the non-Mormons
expressed the perspective that there are multiple perspectives on truth and on the nature of God (including the perspective that there is no God). Even those who were committed practitioners of a particular faith (including some faiths that assert their universalism) usually noted that while they believed their spiritual beliefs were “true and right for me,” they did not think their personal spiritual path was necessarily “true and right” for everyone. In explaining her faith, for example, one Episcopalian noted that “I believe my faith is true — for me. Others may have different ways of understanding God” (PDG, #11).

In contrast, most Mormons articulated the position that the LDS Church is the “one true church” and that they “possess a testimony” to that truth having “personally experienced” it in their own life. These comments reflect the formal position of the LDS Church that over time other forms of Christianity fell away from the teachings of Jesus Christ and that those teachings were only restored when Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon after experiencing a series of visions and revelations from God. These comments also reflect the Mormon practice of “giving testimony,” a ritual whereby individual members stand before the congregation and share a personal account of how they have experienced the truth of the church and its teachings in their own life.

It should be made clear, however, that LDS participants in the dialogue groups did not seek to proselytize during the dialogues. Rather, Mormons usually explained their beliefs in response to inquiries by non-Mormons about the nature of Mormon doctrine. Furthermore, while most Mormons clearly asserted that the LDS Church is “the one true faith,” they sought to do so without denigrating the beliefs of others. As one Mormon
said, “It’s not that I think other faiths don’t have truth to them. But I think the LDS faith has something more to add to the truth” (PDG, #11).

The dialogue groups created a place where these two views could be – at least in many cases – respected and explored at the same time. In day-to-day life in Salt Lake City, however, the disjuncture between these two views often leave both Mormons and non-Mormons feeling judged and rejected in most interactions. For non-Mormons who operate within the worldview that there are multiple truths, the Mormon claim that the LDS Church is “the one true church” often seems arrogant. Many non-Mormons feel put down by the claim, experiencing it as judgment that their spiritual beliefs are “lesser than,” “not as good” or “not as true” as the teachings of the LDS Church. As one non-Mormon said, “I’ve heard LDS doctrine and it is that other churches fell away from Jesus and Joseph Smith, after his vision, restored Christ’s teachings. What that really boils down to is ‘we have the one and only true church’ and ‘guess what, you don’t!’ How can you say that nicely?” (PDG, #10). Some non-Mormons experience the LDS claim to universalism as an attack on who they are or even a threat to their ability to exist. Said one non-Mormon, “That’s what the LDS effort to convert people is – telling someone they are wrong” (PDG, #1). Said another, “I heard the LDS participants speaking and I froze. They were speaking from a perspective that there is only one perspective. I froze because it takes me back to a fear of annihilation” (personal interview, October 27, 2005).

On the other hand, for Mormons who operate within the worldview that there is a universal truth and LDS Church teachings represent that truth, the rejection by non-Mormons of those beliefs can leave them feeling not only personally rejected but also that there is no way to be accepted for who they are within the non-Mormon social world.
The message from non-Mormons appears to be, “I don’t want to hear about who you really are or what you really believe.” As one Mormon said, “I feel that LDS are always seen as on the bad side. That makes me more defensive about my religion than I want to be. A lot of people have a lot of dark anger towards Mormons. I can feel it in their hearts. Some people have a deep hatred of Mormons” (PDG, #13). Said another Mormon:

I have learned to be careful in how I use words because I realize they offend people. But I feel I can’t talk about my life. I have a son on a mission. I thought it was OK for me to speak about him because people would understand that’s my life. But then I hear it makes someone feel marginalized. So I am confused. (PDG, #10)

The religious divide as a conflict emerging from identification with unmourned trauma

If one listens to the narratives spoken during the Bridging the Religious Divide dialogue groups, there is a persistent and prevailing chord that runs through the discourse. It is the sound of melancholic pain, and beneath that pain there is the sound of an often disavowed and usually unspoken desire. The pain is from the human experience of feeling devalued, ostracized and even persecuted. The desire is to be welcomed, respected, valued and even cherished in community for who one is.

When asked to describe what themes they heard during the dialogue groups at a Harvesting workshop near the end of the project, participants wrote: “There are deep wounds in our community;” “Lots of damage has been done, it will take a long time to repair;” “People feel persecuted on both sides;” “The hurt goes both ways – LDS to other, other to LDS” (PHW, November 12, 2005). One facilitator described the atmosphere in his group by saying, “There is real alienation, real pain. Most stories are about a person
in a minority position being hurt, especially children. Almost everyone feels injured in some way. Some feel brutalized” (personal interview, May 20, 2005).

In story after story, Mormons and non-Mormons participating in the dialogue groups described feeling judged, rejected, excluded and socially erased. A few people described the kind of “serious calamity” that Volkan (1997, p. 45) says can cast a group into prolonged trauma. Many more spoke about the kind of “knocks” or psychic woundings that Maalouf (2003) says can create “permanent injury” and “determine men’s attitudes towards their affiliations” (p. 26). At the core of most stories was an experience of feeling dismissed, devalued or even denigrated by others. “I grew up feeling like an outcast,” said one participant. “I had friends until high school and then my old friends seemed to feel they couldn’t be friends with me anymore” (PDG, #12). “What hurts is that no one waves to me when they drive by,” said another (PDG, #11). Someone else commented that “People look at me and assume that I am either evil or crazy. I am an object of fear” (PDG, #11).

Most stories were about simple incidents, but the feelings beneath them ran deep. For the narrators, hurt and sadness had often morphed into anger, and anger into simmering resentment, or melancholic apathy. In the sort of “time collapse” described by Volkan (1997, p. 97), some people spoke of incidents that had happened long ago as if they had happened yesterday. Even when events were historic, the emotions expressed were often in the present tense. One non-Mormon told the following story:

All of my life, I felt that what was being said is that if I am not Mormon, I do not have good moral values. . . . As a second grader, we always said a prayer before class. One day the teacher came up to me and said, “You can’t fold your hands like that.” A little thing like that – folding our hands because we were Catholic – and this lady makes up a lie because she wanted everyone to do things on one side. (PDG, #1)
A Mormon shared this narrative:

I mow my lawn every Saturday morning and I like to talk to people. I live on a pretty busy street so a lot of people pass by. I always say hello to everyone. But so many people just walk by me. It's as if I am invisible. Why? Because I look like a conservative guy? Because I wear black socks? Because they can tell I am Mormon? (PAC, June 2, 2004)

Some described the pain of feeling that the religious divide runs right through them, or the family that they love. A non-Mormon women raised within an extended Mormon family network by parents who had left the LDS Church said “I always felt ‘the other’ when I was growing up. I come from the outside and the inside” (PDG, #11). An ex-Mormon from a highly committed Mormon family said, “How do I negotiate this sense of division in my own family? What am I to do? My family is the place I go to for love” (PDG, #11). A Mormon convert cried, “I am tired of trying to be both in a place that wants me to be one of the other. I am somewhere part of both sides and I just want to be free. Please, just let me be both without putting me in a box” (personal interview, November 7, 2005).

In addition to this chord of melancholic pain, however, there was another theme, muted but pervasive. This was a desire to be accepted, welcomed and valued for who one is in community – a longing for belonging. Some spoke of this desire directly. For most, it appeared as a muffled yearning buried in their narrative. In the narratives just cited, for example, there is an often unspoken yet persistent desire to be an accepted part of community where everyone feels welcome. The non-Mormon repudiated for how she folded her hands wants to be accepted and embraced for her own way of living out her beliefs. The Mormon mowing his lawn wants to be engaged as a valued member of community. The Mormons, non-Mormons, ex-Mormons and converts caught in the
middle of the divide want to be loved for who they are. Said one non-Mormon, “I love Utah. I don’t want to make it uncomfortable for others, but I want to feel I live here and can have values and have people accept me for who I am” (PDG, #13). A Mormon explained, “I want to be able to walk down the street and say ‘hello friend’” (PDG, #3).

The painful narratives that pervade discourse around the religious divide in Salt Lake City, however, compel a closer look at the role of trauma in that divide. This paper asserts that the experience of emotional trauma – both historic and current – by both Mormons and non-Mormons is a critical factor in how people experience, understand and reproduce the divide. More specifically, it contends that the experience of trauma – and more importantly, the experience of trauma that has never been mourned – has compelled Mormons and non-Mormons to turn away from each other, as well as the ideal of community. It has also created, for both communities, a sort of internal template to understand and respond to current events.

**Trauma and foreclosure in Salt Lake City**

When looked at through the theoretical frameworks provided by Volkan (1997) and Butler (1997), Mormons and non-Mormons in Salt Lake City can be seen as suffering a sort of melancholy, a melancholy brought on by the “turning back” from an ideal and/or an “other” to which one was once “passionately attached,” and by the subsequent assumption of an identity defined – at least in part – by the foreclosure of that ideal and/or other. More specifically, the pain-filled narratives of Mormons and non-Mormons reflect a deep desire for community, that is, a yearning to be accepted, welcomed, even cherished, in community for who one is and for the beliefs and behaviors that define one. At the same time, they reflect a foreclosure, or turning away from that ideal – and “the
others" who are seen as having shattered it. The traumatic experiences which triggered that foreclosure – rejection, exclusion and even persecution – have never been really mourned, (and in fact, often have never been spoken about, at least to those considered responsible). Rather, they remain internalized, and serve, as Volkan (1997) says, in a sort of “time collapse” (p. 35) as a template for experiencing, interpreting and responding to current events. Moreover, because the experiences of trauma that triggered that foreclosure remain unmourned, that foreclosure persists as a defense mechanism against potential future harm and is continuously re-enacted.

**Trauma and foreclosure in Mormon identity**

The founding narrative of the LDS community in Utah is often told as the establishment of “Zion” – the “promised land” for Mormons – through sacrifice, endurance and community cooperation. In the mid 1800s, hundreds of Latter-day Saints, many of them pulling handcarts, suffered famine, disease and hardship to trek 1,200 miles across inhospitably rugged terrain to create an entirely new settlement in the midst of the western frontier. Their survival, and eventual prosperity, rested heavily on a commitment to community, and on a willingness to sacrifice individual advantage for the welfare of the whole. “We will make the desert bloom,” the early Mormon settlers purportedly said. And through hard work, selfless service, and community cooperation, they prevailed.

The founding narrative of the LDS community in Utah can also be told, however, as a story of trauma and loss, with the constitutive turn a turn away from “the other.” More specifically, the founding identity of Salt Lake City Mormons can be seen as emerging from a history of traumatic persecution, and based – at least in part – on the
turning away from others who had harassed and tried to eliminate them, as well as from the ideal of being fully accepted and embraced for their religious beliefs.

Mormon pioneers left their homes and prosperous communities in the Midwest for the less-than-hospitable valley of the Great Salt Lake because they suffered repeated harassment and persecution in their former places of residence. Prior to their exodus to the Salt Lake Valley, the Mormon experience was periodically marked by ridicule, ostracization and violence at the hands of others. While some historians contend that Mormons “weren’t entirely blameless victims of persecution” (Riess & Bigelow, 2005, p. 196), there can be no doubt that Latter-day Saints were the target of brutally hostile attacks in the early years of their history. During the 1830s and 1840s, Joseph Smith, founder and first prophet of the LDS Church, attempted to create a home base for Latter-day Saints, first in Ohio, then in Missouri and then Illinois. In each of these locations, Mormons encountered ill will and violence as Mormonism collided with the local populations. In Ohio, mobs ransacked and burned down their homes. In Missouri, hostile residents formed militias and invaded Mormon settlements, destroyed property and tortured and killed Mormon citizens. The Missouri governor, acting on exaggerated reports of Mormon “outrages” (p. 191), even issued an order sanctioning the elimination of Mormons from the state, either by driving them out or by killing. And in Illinois, after critics of the LDS Church publicized Joseph Smith’s then-secret teaching of plural marriage, anti-Mormon sentiment erupted and the prophet and his brother were violently killed.

Confronted with such pervasive enmity, Mormons turned away from existing social communities and the government that had failed to protect them, and fled west in
1847 until they reached a place empty of any other permanent Euro-American settlers, a place that they could lay claim to as their own. In the Salt Lake Valley, Mormons created their own self-reliant and self-sufficient community, a community where they hoped to practice their religion and grow their community without threat from others. Even in the relative isolation of the frontier West, however, Mormons continued to be assailed for their way of life and pressured to change it. Concerned that Mormons were establishing a theocracy in the Salt Lake Valley, and objecting to the practice of polygamy, the federal government sent troops to Utah in 1857. The U.S. Congress also passed a series of laws designed to stop the practice of polygamy, including legislation that took the vote away from all Utah women and polygamous men, froze church assets in excess of $50,000 and declared children of plural marriages illegitimate in the eyes of the government.

There can be little doubt that such a profound period of repeated harassment and persecution affected Mormons' sense of self and relationship to others. Although generally recognized as a warm and welcoming people today, it is arguable that the intense emotional trauma experienced by Mormons during this turbulent period of their history caused Mormons as a group to take up an identity that is based – at least in part – on a self-protective turn away from others, others who had in very real terms been a threat to Mormon existence. It is also arguable that, at least to some degree, that self-protective boundary persists today. Although 150 years have passed since Mormons were the target of efforts to violently eliminate them and Mormonism is now accepted as one of the world’s major religions, a “mental representation” (Volkan, 1997, p. 48) of this period of persecution remains alive in the collective memory of the Mormon community. As Ries and Bigelow (2005) write:
To understand today’s Mormon culture and mindset, you have to understand what happened during the faith’s earliest days, especially between Joseph Smith’s organization of the Church in 1830 and his martyrdom in 1844. The Church devotes considerable instruction time to early Latter-day Saint history, and most Mormons are quite familiar with what happened during the 1830s and 1840s. (p. 185)

Comments by Mormons during the Bridging the Religious Divide dialogues reflect the truth of this statement. In response to the question, for example, “How do you experience the religious divide in your own personal life?” one Mormon answered, “I have to say my experience of the religious divide goes back to the 1830s when Mormons were the target of what today would be called ‘ethnic cleansing.’ I know that was a long time ago, but feelings of persecution and paranoia take a long time to fade away” (PDG, #11). Another Mormon described how as a child, she and her siblings would repeatedly act out the “evil others” coming to kill Joseph Smith and his brother as they played outside. “That was our favorite game,” she said. “It may sound silly, but those are the stories we grew up with” (personal interview, November 10, 2005). Another Mormon contended that although many Mormons may not reflect consciously on the history of persecution, it is “held in the collective unconscious of the community in the form of many songs and stories” (personal interview, February 5, 2003).

A number of scholars have observed that the Mormon history of persecution, as well as the collective memory of that persecution, have caused Mormons as a group to establish – and maintain – a self-protective distance from non-Mormon society. Dean May, a professor of history at the University of Utah, for example, commented that:

The 19th Century was one long civil-rights persecution of Mormons. Members were run out of Illinois and Missouri, where the governor had issued an order to exterminate them. Federal troops invaded Utah when it was a territory. Federal judges would not naturalize Mormon immigrants. Mormons were denied the right to vote and be on juries. . . There is a
residual vigilance that comes from the historical experience of the
Mormon people. That’s one thing that people don’t understand about the
Mormon people. Like the Jewish people, they have a real history that
gives cohesiveness and sensitivity to issues and certainly among [the
issues] is a history of persecution [italics added]. (May, 2003, February 5)

Similarly, Knowlton (2006) notes that Mormons have “historically created
boundaries with the national society,” boundaries based on “a history of mutual suspicion
and distrust” (p. 167). Furthermore, Knowlton maintains that these boundaries are
“maintained and constantly strengthened” by church rules regarding the avoidance of
alcohol, coffee and tea as well as the avoidance of “national culture that is defined as
salacious” (p. 167). The effect of these rules, says Knowlton (2001), is to “build a space
of separation between Mormons and non-Mormons” (p. 11). From this perspective, a
number of other Mormon activities – wearing garments (special underclothing holding
religious symbolism), serving on missions, proselytizing – can be understood not only as
an affirmative performance of Mormon faith and identity. They can also be understood as
serving to re-inscribe Mormon identity and to maintain the boundary that protects that
identity.

Similarly, in his study of Mormon culture, Davies (2000) remarks on the “ethos of
fear and self-defense” (p. 183) that characterized Mormon culture historically. He also
notes that a number of practices which serve to re-inscribe Mormon identity also tend to
draw a strong boundary between Mormons and others. Davies observes for example, that
Mormons consider temples, the home and even the body as places of refuge and security.
He writes:

One key meaning associated with temples is that of Zion . . . a theological
ideal as the place of gathering, a moral territory set apart from the evil of
Babylon. It established itself as the symbolic term to describe the lands of the wicked world replete with their equally symbolic “Gentile” inhabitants. (p. 39)

Similarly, Davies (2000) writes, “The fact that a store of food is maintained in each household is itself symbolic of the domestic arena as a place of refuge and security” (p. 146). These are images that suggest the outer world is somehow dangerous, threatening or “other” and that the way to protect oneself is to “turn away” from that world to the safety and security of one’s own community.

Davies (2000) also notes the significance of the wearing of garments as an identity marker which serves to remind Mormons of an identity set apart from others. Temple garments are a “true multivocal symbol possessing layers of meaning and significance,” writes Davies. In wearing garments, “Saints are reminded of the key temple ritual and esoteric teaching that distinguish Mormonism from other forms of Christianity” (p. 124). Similarly, Davies notes how the secrecy surrounding the Mormon rites and rituals is “a means of maintaining a boundary that ensures a privilege of access to the prime source of identity” (p. 35).

Along this same vein, one person interviewed for this study argued that the self-reliant ethic of Mormonism has its roots in the Mormon history of persecution and reflects a distrust and turn away from others. The Mormon welfare program, she contended, was originally initiated “because Mormons did not want to rely on the federal government.” Rather they wanted “a way to have self sufficiency and to protect their own. ‘We don’t want to be beholden to others’ is part of it” (personal interview, February 6, 2003).
Mormons’ historical experience of trauma – and the collective memory of that trauma – can also be seen as creating a sort of template (or, in Volkan’s (1997) words, an internal script) which serves to shape the interpretation and response to current events. Knowlton (2006) asserts, for example, that Mormons’ “historical memory of persecution and conflict with the nation” creates a “structure of sentiment” through which “conflicts with outsiders . . . are felt and understood” (p. 167).

An example is how some Mormons participating in the dialogue groups described their experience of the religious divide. Just cited, for example, is the Mormon who said his experience of the divide went “back to the 1830s when Mormons were the target of what today would be called ‘ethnic cleansing’” (PDG, #11). Another example is a Mormon who said he fears the “large influx of people coming in” to Salt Lake City because they will “turn the table” on Mormons. “We came here because we were persecuted,” said this man. “And we had certain values. And now the tables are turning as a large influx of people are coming in. We fear we will not have the city we wanted and we developed” (PDG, #1).

The response of many Mormons to the dispute over the Main Street Plaza provides another example. Many Mormons interpreted public opposition to the sale of Main Street, as well as the lawsuit challenging the sale, as nothing more than a hostile and deliberate attack on the LDS Church and its members. When a member of the Unitarian Church (a plaintiff in the ALCU lawsuit) tried to explain the lawsuit in his dialogue group as “about the protection of free speech” (PDG, #10), for example, several Mormons immediately retorted, “It was an attack on the church” (PDG, #10). In letters to the editor and comments at public meetings, Mormons repeatedly expressed the belief
that they were once again the target of prejudicial and hostile intentions. A handful of hecklers, who briefly used the plaza to proselytize and rudely harass Mormons passing by, seemed to turn the head of the entire LDS community, perhaps because they seemed to be re-enacting the past.

In addition, most Mormons insisted that the only acceptable resolution to the plaza dispute was for the LDS Church to gain complete control over the plaza through the elimination of the pedestrian right-of-way and the free-speech rights the court had determined were attached to that right-of-way. Potential solutions - like regulations restricting the time, place and manner of free speech activities - which sought to honor both the religious significance of the plaza as well as first amendment rights were rejected as totally unacceptable, presumably because they were seen as leaving Mormons too vulnerable to harassment and attack.

One Mormon, who unsuccessfully encouraged LDS Church authorities to accept time, place and manner regulations, described how he had tried to convince one church leader to “walk out onto the plaza with me” (personal interview, March 14, 2003). According to this man, the authority declined, saying “Someone will throw something at me” (personal interview, March 14, 2003). This man explained his understanding of the authority’s statement by recounting how his grandmother had once brought him to the banks of the Missouri River as a young boy. “She described to me how my ancestors had tried to cross that very river more than 100 years ago,” he said. “It was winter, and the river was frozen, but the ice was thin, too thin to trust” (personal interview, March 14, 2003). The Mormons were fleeing for their lives, he explained. They could see the fires of their temple and homes burning behind them. So feeling they had no choice, they
drove their wagons out onto the ice. And in some places, the ice broke, swallowing some of the wagons in their flight for life. “Do you think those memories are real to Mormons?” he asked. “You bet they are. They are seared into our memory” (personal interview, March 14, 2003).

Finally, it is important to note that while Mormons no longer face violent efforts to eliminate or segregate them, they are still the object of substantial prejudice. Opinion polls conducted in 2006, for example, show that at least 37% of voters would not vote for a Mormon for president, a higher percentage than those who said they would not vote for a woman or a Black (Estrich, 2007). Even if the collective memory of persecution has not compelled some Mormons to make a self-protective “turn away” from non-Mormons, repeated encounters with this kind of enduring prejudice can cause the kind of emotional wounding that motivate such a turn. Complaints by Mormons in Salt Lake City that they feel repeatedly pigeon-holed and stereotyped and judged because of their religious affiliation indicate that they encounter this prejudice frequently. And the pain-filled narratives spoken during the dialogue groups show that for most Mormons, encounters with prejudice are emotionally painful, painful enough to foster a defensive “turn away” from the other. As one Mormon explained, “Some people have a deep hatred of Mormons. I can feel it in their heart when they say things. LDS are always seen as on the bad side. That makes me more defensive about my religion than I want to be” (PDG, #13).

**Trauma and foreclosure in non-Morman identity**

Just as this paper argues that Mormon identity is defined – at least in part – by identification with the unmourned trauma of persecution and a “turning away” from non-
Mormons, it also argues that the identities of non-Mormons in Salt Lake City are defined—at least in part—by identification with the unmourned trauma of rejection or exclusion and a “turning away” from Mormons. Furthermore, just as this paper argues that the Mormon experience and memory of persecution forms a template for understanding and responding to current events, it also argues that the non-Mormon experience of rejection and exclusion forms such a template.

If one listens to the narratives of non-Mormons in Salt Lake City, for example, one hears story after story of feeling de-valued, rejected and excluded (and sometimes even threatened) because one is not Mormon. Similarly, one hears a turn away from Mormons and from a shattered ideal of being accepted and embraced in community without judgment.

A cogent example is the following story told by one non-Mormon woman in a dialogue group. When she moved here 8 years ago with her 3 children, she said, she was very excited to see lots of kids in her neighborhood, kids she assumed would make great friends for her own children. The day after they arrived, her daughter went off to elementary school, thrilled with the prospect of making new friends. At the end of the day, however, her daughter climbed into the van and slammed the door. “What’s the matter?” the woman asked. “Everyone asked me if I was a Mormon,” her daughter cried. “Does it matter Mom?” “I told her it doesn’t matter to us,” the woman said, “but that I guess it does to some people” (PDG, #11).

Another example is the following story published in the Salt Lake Tribune’s special report called “The Unspoken Divide:”

Alex Sepulveda lost his best buddy when he was 11 years old. The boy didn’t die, but the friendship did, for one simple reason. Alex was not a
Mormon. The breakup hit Supulveda, now 25, like a sucker punch in the gut. “I was going to sleep over at his house on a Friday night, but then he came up to me and said I couldn’t come because his parents said I was a bad influence. That was it. We never hung out after that,” says Sepulveda, reared in Sandy without religion. “We’d see each other in the school hallway and wouldn’t even say hi. (Egan, 2001)

Sepulveda did not let go of his hurt. He held it deep inside him, along with his shattered love of his friend. Who he was in the world became defined, in part, by the pain and resentment he felt at his loss. As the reporter telling Sepulveda’s story wrote:

The hurt persisted until the day both boys slipped out of childhood and into their black caps and gowns. At the end of the high school graduation ceremony, Sepulveda was asked to stand and be recognized. “I remember . . . hoping his parents were looking at me and thinking: Oh? The bad influence is going to Harvard.” (Egan, 2001)

The emotional trauma experienced by these individuals undoubtedly differs from that experienced by members of the LDS Church during the decades of persecution. Their lives were not threatened; their entire community was not under attack. But the experience of judgment, rejection and loss is still very real and emotionally wounding. And the human response is the same – a turning away from those who are seen as hurting or endangering them and from the ideal of being accepted and valued in community for who one is without threat of judgment or rejection.

Like these two people, many non-Mormons in Salt Lake City have established a self-protective distance from Mormons, a distance created in many instances after feeling emotionally wounded in some way. Furthermore, at least in part because those wounds have never healed, many non-Mormons in Salt Lake City continue to maintain that distance, re-inscribing a boundary that creates “a space of separation” between themselves and Mormons. One non-Mormon who described feeling painfully excluded and ostracized by Mormons as a child, said life in Salt Lake City was not so difficult as
an adult, "but then, I hang out with my own" (PDG, #1). Another non-Mormon explained that she had a "really difficult time as a child growing up in a predominantly Mormon neighborhood and school and it took me a long time to get over it" (PDG, #10). To get by, she said, "I learned not to share my beliefs," a practice she continues today. "I will listen to LDS share their ideas about how the world works," she said, "but I rarely get into mine. I know they would be met with incredulity or judgment" (PDG, #10).

Some non-Mormons admit to creating or belonging to social worlds that are defined in part by the defensive exclusion of Mormons. In these stories, it is particularly evident how non-Mormon identity may be constructed, at least in part, on the "turning away" from and foreclosure of Mormons, and how that foreclosure is maintained through a repeated re-iteration of "us" versus "them." As Knowlton (2006) observes, "when the Mormons are absent, they [often] become a negative topic of conversation to build solidarity among the non-Mormon population" (p. 166). The irony, of course, is that the "us" created through such discourse is constructed on "not being them," and consequently binds that "us" to that "them," compelling in Butler's (1997) terms, "a traumatic repetition of what has been foreclosed" (p. 9). The following excerpt from the Salt Lake Tribune special report provides an example:

Maria Facelli, 13, and her friends share a disdain for the LDS culture. These eighth graders at Clayton Middle School in Salt Lake City roll their eyes when the choir teacher mentions "the big choir downtown." They mock the girls who go on about LDS Young Women’s activities. They note which kids blame their tardiness on early morning visits to the temple. "I’m guilty of this and a lot of people are. We use that as a bonding for us," Maria says. "Even if we’re not totally against it, we form this angry little shield to protect us." (Moulton, 2001)

From this perspective, a number of behaviors sometimes practiced by the non-Mormon youth culture in Salt Lake City, such as piercings, tattoos, and smoking, can be
understood not only as an effort to express or explore one’s individuality. They can also be understood as a way to identify oneself as not a member of the dominant Mormon culture, and to re-inscribe the boundary that protects that identity. As one non-Mormon reflected, “If I tell someone I am from Utah, I usually feel compelled to add, but I’m not LDS” (PDG, #2).

Non-Mormons who experience emotional trauma in their relationships to Mormons will often continue to interpret and respond to future interactions through the “template” created by the internalization of that trauma. This appears to be especially true, if – as in all the narratives described in this section – the emotional wound caused by the trauma has not been fully mourned or somehow healed. A woman who explained how she felt “judged for being a naughty girl” (personal interview, May 16, 2005) when co-workers saw her drinking coffee in her cubicle in her predominantly Mormon workplace, described how – in the months following that event – she found herself muttering “stupid Mormon” (personal interview, May 16, 2005) whenever a car cut her off on the freeway. Another example is the woman described earlier who felt so rejected when, from her perspective, her children were not warmly welcomed by Mormon kids. This same woman also reported feeling utterly betrayed years later when one of her son’s friends wrote him a letter after leaving to serve an LDS mission. According to her account, the letter encouraged her son to convert to the LDS faith. Her son and this friend, she said, had been part of a religiously diverse group of guys – Protestant, Catholic, Mormon, atheist – who had become very close during high school despite their differences in religious orientation. But now, she said, she felt that friendship was possibly shattered. “How could he write that to my son,” she said. “It’s like he is telling my son that he is
not good enough as he is. That he needs to be Mormon to be loved” (PDG, #11). It had been 9 months since they had received the letter and her son had yet to answer it. The woman was stunned when other people in the group (including both Mormons and non-Mormons) said that they didn’t see the letter as a judgment, a rejection or a betrayal, but as an expression of love.

The reaction of many non-Mormons to the Main Street Plaza dispute can also be seen as shaped by the internalization of emotional wounds suffered during earlier interactions with Mormons. When the LDS Church prohibited certain kinds of speech, dress and conduct on the newly constructed plaza in an effort to ensure a respectful environment, for example, many non-Mormons were quick to experience those restrictions as a repudiation or rejection of non-Mormons and their ways of life. Writing for the plaintiffs challenging the restrictions, for example, the ACLU described the restrictions as sending “a message of exclusion” (ACLU, 2001). First Unitarian Church Reverend Tom Goldsmith, whose community had joined the lawsuit, said, “Now that the city has sold Main Street and allowed the new owners to silence and banish anyone who might offer an alternative voice or experience, we feel as though we are welcome only so long as we are neither seen or heard” (ACLU, 2001).

This chapter has argued that the Main Street Plaza dispute, and the religious divide that underlies it, are best understood as conflict driven by identity-based issues. More specifically, this chapter has described how these conflicts are driven by identification with incommensurate worldviews and with unmourned trauma. In the next chapter, this paper briefly describes traditional, as well as emerging, theoretical perspectives about how to work with such conflict.
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ABOUT HOW TO DEAL WITH CONFLICT EMERGING FROM DIVERGENT WORLDVIEWS

The question of how to deal with conflict emerging from divergent worldviews or moral orders is not a new problem. Rather, it can be considered one of the central and continuing challenges of any community, at least, communities which consider themselves governed by democratic principles (e.g., Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Mouffe, 2000; Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997; Toker, 2004). It is arguable, however, that conflict between divergent worldviews is increasing worldwide as the forces of globalization break down geographic, political and cultural boundaries that have traditionally separated people with different moral traditions. As Pearce and Littlejohn (1997) write, "in most of human history, people lived in small, cohesive societies in which differences could be managed by an integrating framework, usually religious" (p. 108). Now, "the experience of 'otherness'" is "a regular aspect of life" (p. 102).

Within the United States, scholars studying conflict not only argue that the "issue of deep disagreement has long been one of the challenges of the American political experiment" (Toker, 2004, p. 177), they also assert that the conflict between divergent worldviews has become one of the culture's most pressing problems. Gutmann and Thompson (1996) write, for example, "Of the challenges that American democracy faces today, none is more formidable than the problem of moral disagreement" (p. 1).
Traditionally, (at least in Western democracies) the conversation about how to deal with deep disagreement in communities has focused primarily on how to resolve such disagreements, usually by identifying – most often through a rational process of discursive exchange involving all participants on some sort of equal basis – some sameness or commonality that transcends or supercedes the difference. Some theorists have contended that the cohering glue of commonality is best grounded in a shared identity. Others have argued for the identification of common, or at least compatible, interests through rational processes based on shared principles.

This focus on responding to difference by finding sameness appears to be driven by an assumption that at least some level of homogeneity and agreement is essential for a well-functioning society. Ferguson (2006a) argues, for example, that even as political theorists seek to re-theorize democracy to accommodate diversity, they speak to the importance of homogeneity and agreement in democracy. Ferguson writes:

We share democracy with people who are different from us and who disagree with us. Yet the tradition of Western democratic theory teaches us that homogeneity and agreement are essential for a well-functioning society. For example some political theorists maintain that democratic institutions can only be maintained where citizens share identity, interests, or patriotic attachment to their country. (p. 1)

As a result, says Ferguson (2006a), a reoccurring theme of democratic theory has been to inquire into what citizens must share in common, or, what should form the core of their collective identity. Ferguson points to political theorist, John Stuart Mills, who argued that citizens need to share a “fellow feeling” and be “united among themselves” by “common sympathies” (Mills, 1991, p. 428) for a democratic society to cohere despite inevitable dissension. Mills held that fellow feeling emerged from sharing a common circumstance: the same race or ancestry, the same language or religion, the same
geographic sense of place, or, the same narrative. While later theorists largely rejected Mill's emphasis on nationalism as the basis for shared civic identity, they continued to focus on the need for some form of homogeneity and agreement. Rawls (1971) argued, for example, that people with different conceptions of the good can live together in political association if they share a common core political morality, or in other words, subscribe to a shared conception of justice. As Ferguson (2006b) writes, Rawls "presumed that, in his ideal society, citizens would share basic moral beliefs that would enable them to all arrive at the same principles of justice" (p. 1). More specifically, Rawls advocated the notion of "justice as fairness" (p. 35) – the idea of society as a fair system of cooperation over time, with cooperation guided by publicly recognized rules and procedures that those cooperating accept and regard as properly regulating their conduct.

Habermas (1984) promoted a proceduralist approach to resolving moral disagreement, contending that parties with divergent moral perspectives can arrive at "generalizable interests which can be agreed upon by all participants," provided that they agree to and engage in procedures of deliberation which ensure "impartiality, equality, openness and lack of coercion" (Mouffe, 2000, p. 89). Habermas' "ideal speech situation" created a model for such deliberation.

In a similar vein, Gutmann and Thompson (1996) argue that moral disagreements are best addressed through the process of "deliberative democracy." More specifically, they contend that parties in moral disagreement can reach decisions that are morally acceptable to both sides if they engage in rational deliberations guided by six principles – reciprocity, publicity, accountability (that regulate the process of politics) and basic liberty, basic opportunity and fair opportunity (that govern the content of politics). Even
if the parties cannot reach complete consensus, say Guttman and Thomson, the process of deliberative democracy can allow citizens to reach “provisional moral agreement” that “all can mutually recognize as such” (p. 16).

This focus – on resolving deep disagreement by identifying some sameness or commonality through a rational discursive process – is also emphasized in the practical and theoretical literature on conflict resolution. In this literature, conflict is often characterized as an incompatibility between the perceived needs of two or more parties. Interventions generally emphasize seeking resolution (that is, coming to common agreement) through the identification of mutually acceptable solutions based on the identification of common (or at least compatible) interests through a rational process that is fair. For example, in the book, Getting to Yes – arguably the most popular text in the United States on how to work with conflict – the authors argue that the best way for people to deal with differences is through the process of “principled negotiation” (Fisher, Ury & Patton, 1981, p. xviii). They outline a four point approach that involves: rational discussion of the problem, identifying common, or last least compatible interests; brainstorming options that provide for mutual gain; and utilizing objective criteria or standards that both parties consider “fair.” A primary principle is to “focus on interests, not positions” because “behind opposed positions lie shared and compatible interests [italics added]” (p. 191). The identification of “shared and compatible interests,” (or if interests appear to be opposed, the identification of decision criteria that both sides agree is fair) creates the foundation for inventing potential solutions that are beneficial, or at least acceptable, to each party. Many, if not most, mediation training programs emphasize the principles outlined in Getting to Yes.
This paper argues, however, that traditional conflict resolution theories and strategies that emphasize resolution, rationality and finding commonality backfire in conflict situations involving identity-based issues. This happens for several reasons. First of all, it is because people who are engaged in conflict involving identification with divergent or incommensurate worldviews lack a common “symbolic frame” – or grammar – for speaking and acting together (Docherty, 2001; Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). In other words, language and symbols have different meanings within the social reality of each side. Docherty (2001) observes, for example, that “most negotiation research presumes the parties operate within the same symbolic frame” (p. 195), or worldviewing narrative. This assumption may not be unwarranted, she notes, in routine confrontations, such as that between a salesperson and a customer negotiating to buy an automobile. In these kinds of disputes, the parties largely share the same “metaframe” or “worldviewing narrative,” as well as the same “substantive frame” or definition of the conflict (Docherty, 2001, p. 195). In such situations, traditional conflict resolution strategies – such as advising people to focus on interests, not positions, or to clarify interests, values, and needs – can be effective. In fact, the identification of needs and interests in such situation can often help – as the conflict resolution literature argues – to flesh out common or at least compatible interests, laying the foundation for inventing potential solutions that satisfy both parties’ concerns.

When parties lack a common symbolic frame or grammar, however, even the most eloquent articulation of one’s needs and interests may exacerbate rather than ease the conflict. As Pearce and Littlejohn (1997) write, “Using the best rhetoric available within one’s repertoire, no matter how polite it might be, does not ensure understanding
and respect” (p. 7) when parties lack commensurate grammars. They give the example of a debate they listened to between then Senator Lowell Weicker, a moderate Republican from Connecticut, and a representative from the “New Christian Right” – individuals operating within two divergent worldviews. The effort to rationally debate their differences did not foster understanding, or even mutual respect. Rather, the scholars say they “were struck by the extent to which the arguments made by the debaters went past each other” (p. 11). What one side considered a “good argument,” they write, “was heard by the other as further proof that the speaker was mad, bad, or sick” (pp. 11-12).

Second, and perhaps more important, traditional conflict resolution theories and strategies often exacerbate conflict involving identity-based issues because disputants may experience those strategies as asking them to give up – or substantially compromise – their identities. This is because, as discussed earlier, the identity of most people is constructed, at least in part, on identification with a set of beliefs or ideals, as well as a marking of “what I am not.” It is also because, as also noted earlier, people tend to identify with and defend most fiercely those aspects of their identity that they feel are under threat.

Conflict resolution strategies that emphasize reaching resolution through finding common ground or identifying common interests may cause parties to feel that they are being asked to give up – or substantially compromise – the beliefs and ideals that define them. They may also feel that such strategies are asking them to dissolve the boundaries that mark who or what they are not. Furthermore, in these situations, parties are likely to feel that the beliefs and ideals that define them are under threat, and in a self-protective
move, become even more identified with and defensive of those beliefs and values. As Carpenter and Kennedy (1991) write:

Our values . . . are the standards by which we judge events and the behavior of other people and by which we decide what is worthy of our support and what deserves our condemnation. . . . Asking someone to adjust his values is like asking him to alter his sense of reality. (pp. 197-198)

Because identity is not something people are usually willing to compromise, forums intended for reaching resolution through finding common ground or shared interests can become battlegrounds where each side asserts and defends its identity and the worldview that defines it. The result may be, as Docherty (2001) writes, that “the more contact the parties have with one another, the more focused they become on their differences” (p. 53).

Third, in the case of conflicts involving identification with trauma and the foreclosure of the other, traditional conflict resolution strategies often fail because the emphasis on rationality does not provide opportunity to unfold and explore the underlying emotional experiences that gave rise to such identifications. As a result, disputants are likely to interpret and respond to current events through the psychic template created by the original trauma. Similarly, disputants are likely to simply re-enact a “turn away” from the other as they seek to maintain their identity and protect themselves from future trauma.

Docherty (2001) comments, for example, that the focus on rational analytical problem solving misses the real substance of the deepest and most profound conflicts. Similarly, Volkan (1997) observes that even though there is “evidence of complex and intertwined psychological issues in many cases” of ethnic and large-group conflict, the
concept of “realpolitik” – “the application of rational evaluation and realistic assessment of the options available to one’s group and to an opposing one” – “continues to be the main foundation of the modern diplomatic world” (p. 17). While this approach has its merit, says Volkan, “the rational and the traditional are overemphasized” (p. 18). Volkan quotes political scientist Donald Horowitz who notes that the amount of passion expressed in ethnic conflicts “calls out for [an] explanation that does justice to the realm of feelings” and that “a bloody phenomenon cannot be explained by a bloodless theory” (p. 18).

In response to these and other issues, an increasing number of scholars and practitioners are questioning some of the assumptions built into traditional strategies for dealing with deep differences. In particular, they are questioning the traditional focus on resolution, rationality and commonality. These scholars and practitioners are also calling for new ways to think about and work with conflict. At the heart of their thinking is the view that difference and conflict are ineradicable, and thus strategies for working with conflict need to focus more on how to engage and live with difference rather than how to resolve it. In addition, there is growing recognition that the experience of trauma plays a critical role in how individuals and groups experience future events and relate to “the other.” Thus, there is advocacy for strategies that create space for the affective as well as the rational, and allow individuals and groups to open up past hurts and begin unfolding the “foreclosure” of others. These scholars and practitioners offer their critiques from a diversity of backgrounds, including communication, political science and conflict resolution.
In a wide-ranging reflection on the history of the idea of communication, Peters (1999), for example, argues that difference and disjuncture are natural, omnipresent and unavoidable conditions among humans. Peters further argues that communication—especially rational discourse—is not the magic wand that will allow people to reconcile otherness by finding some resolving sameness. In fact, Peters rejects the age-old ideal that communication can facilitate “fusion” (p. 21) — that is, the sharing or duplicating of consciousness between two or more people—as well as the notion that such fusion is even possible. Instead, Peters embraces an ontology of the “‘infinite remoteness’ of the other and the self” (McDaniel, 2000, p. 259). He contends that communication should be rethought of as “dissemination” (Peters, 1999, p. 10) or the broadcasting of words like scattered seed on uneven ground. Peters does not directly take up the issue of how to deal with deep disagreements between individuals or groups. But his message is that, deep or shallow, difference and disjuncture are part of the human situation and cannot be dispelled even by the most elaborate or carefully constructed efforts at communication. Rather than finding despair in this conclusion, however, Peters finds hope and even delight. For Peters, acknowledging that the other is always exotic and ever-distant fosters a mindfulness that otherness is always present. Furthermore, accepting that communication will always fall short of communion simply creates an incentive to seek out the other. As Peters writes, “That we are destined to interpret, and that interpretation will always involve our desires and their conflicts, does not signal a fall from the supposed grace of immediacy; it is a description of the very possibility of interaction” (p. 268).
Peters (1999) refocuses the conversation about difference and communication. Rather than theorizing how communication can dispel difference, Peters asks how we can use communication to help us embrace, engage and live with difference. He writes:

Deliberations about communication are exercises not in self-knowledge, but in living with the other. The concept of communication has the virtue of refusing to let us think of those tasks separately. The key question for 20th century communication theory — a question at once philosophical, moral and political — is how wide and deep our empathy for otherness can reach, how ready we are to see the human as precisely what is different. (p. 230)

Although focusing on democratic politics rather than the history of communication, political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2000) also argues that difference and disjuncture are ineradicable and that the important question is how to live with it, rather than how to dispel it. More specifically, in a critique of what she calls the “consensus approach” to democracy, Mouffe rejects the notion that what creates and sustains vital democracies is creating a unifying consensus through some rational process of deliberation. In fact, similar to Peters, she argues that consensus in any true sense of the word is an impossibility. Consensus-based approaches to democracy, she says “pretend that all interests can be reconciled and that everybody — provided they identify with the project — can be part of the people” (p. 14).

According to Mouffe (2000), such thinking is flawed. This is because the consensus approach “presupposes the availability of a non-exclusive public sphere where a non-coercive consensus could be attained” (p. 135). Such a space, says Mouffe, does not and cannot exist. Rather, argues Mouffe “We have to accept that every consensus exists as a temporary result of provisional hegemony, as a stabilization of power, and that
it always entails some form of exclusion” (p. 104). Mouffe turns to Derrida to help explain her reasoning. Mouffe says:

Derrida shows that impartial standpoint is made structurally impossible by the undecidability which is at work in the construction of any form of objectivity. To see difference as the condition of possibility of constituting unity and totality, and at the same time as constituting their essential limits, forces us to acknowledge that alterity and otherness are irreducible. (p. 135)

In other words, Mouffe (2000), like Hall, maintains that the existence of any entity – an individual, a group, or a demos – requires for its own ontological possibility the existence of a “constitutive outside” (Hall, 1996, p. 4). In other words, inherent in the establishment of any “I” or “us” is always the existence of a “you” or “them.” Thus, true consensus is always an illusion; some party or interest (usually those with the least power) is always excluded. As Mouffe puts it, “the ‘them’ is not the constitutive opposite of a concrete ‘us,’ but the symbol of what makes any ‘us’ impossible” (p. 13).

Thus, similar to Peters, Mouffe (2000) argues that rather than seeking consensus, democracies need to focus on how to live with difference. As Mouffe writes, the final identity of “the people” who make up a democracy “can never be fully constituted, and it can exist only through multiple and competing forms of identifications” (p. 56).

For Mouffe, the critical move is to transform the potential antagonism existing in human relations into agonism. Mouffe describes “antagonism” as the relationship that takes place between enemies, that is people who have no common symbolic space. In contrast, she defines “agonism” as the relationship between “‘friendly enemies,’ that is, persons who are friends because they share a common symbolic space but also enemies because they want to organize this common symbolic space in a different way” (p. 13).

While Mouffe (2000) provides limited commentary on how to make the move to
agonism, she does offer three suggestions. First, Mouffe calls for abandoning the "rationalist" (p. 7) approach which seeks to reach some sort of universal or homogenizing commonality. Rather, Mouffe counsels, "leave the conversation on justice forever open" (p. 76). While maintaining that complete consensus is an impossibility, Mouffe advises us to allow "the multiplicity of voices that a pluralist society encompasses" diverse "forms of expression instead of striving towards harmony and consensus" (p. 77).

Second, Mouffe (2000) insists that we must allow, or better yet embrace, a plurality of forms of citizen identification, with the concomitant diversity of differentiated positions. "Democratic citizenship can take many diverse forms," writes Mouffe, "and such a diversity, far from being a danger for democracy, is in fact its very condition of existence" (p. 74).

Finally, Mouffe argues that we need to re-admit passion into political discourse if we are to move towards "agonistic" relations with those we disagree with. Transforming antagonism into agonism, says Mouffe:

requires providing channels through which collective passions will be given ways to express themselves over issues, which, while allowing enough possibility for identification, will not construct the opponent as an enemy but as an adversary. (p. 103)

Finally, in an iconoclastic book that critiques the field of conflict resolution, Bernard Mayer (2004) sounds themes similar to those raised by Peters and Mouffe. Arguing that the traditional focus on resolution, rationality and commonality have failed to help in many conflicts, Mayer calls for new approaches to conflict work that emphasize engagement, allow emotionality and respect the reality of difference.

In a critique highly relevant to conflict involving identity, Mayer (2004) contends that conflict resolution as a field of practice is “marginalized in impact” and “limited in
scope” because “the ways in which we have structured our services and thought about what we have to offer have often implied to disputants that they were going to have to give up their deeper purposes or needs in order to accept our help” (p. 28). More specifically, Mayer says that the traditional focus on resolution, rationality and finding commonality in most mediation and other consensus-building processes does not meet the needs of many people who are embroiled in conflict. What many people need and want, says Mayer, is “voice,” that is, “to be heard,” and to be “heard in a way that reinforces their sense of who they are and is congruent with their values” (p. 24). In addition, people want “validation” and “vindication” – “validation of feelings and point of view” (p. 26) and vindication “in the sense that the outcome somehow furthers disputants’ sense that they are right and that their cause is just” (p. 25). Finally, people embroiled in conflict also want to feel they have an impact on the immediate problem, as well as the broader issues, that are contributing to their conflict. They also want conflict resolution procedures that are fair and safe.

According to Mayer, however, many conflict resolution processes leave people feeling they have to sacrifice at least some of these needs to participate. The traditional emphasis on resolution, for example, is often premature, or even at times, inappropriate and can leave disputants feeling unheard and unsatisfied. “Conflict is a process that is not always amenable to resolution, as we usually understand it,” he writes (p. 32). In many circumstances, says Mayer, “people in conflict want help understanding, surfacing, intensifying, or conducting a conflict” (p. 32) rather than help resolving it. But, he writes, “The conflict resolution field has not given much more than lip-service (if that) to helping people engage in conflict effectively and constructively” (pp. 32-33).
Similarly the traditional emphasis on rationality, leaves little space for the kind of anger, pain and passion that people often bring to conflict. Mayer (2004) writes:

We advocate a norm that disputants should always show respect for each other... But... in the name of respect, we fail to honor equally the anger, rage, hurt, and fear that people are often experiencing. Conflict resolution forums can create a sort of emotional straitjacket that sometimes allows people to discuss their feelings but seldom provides an opportunity to give genuine voice to them. (p. 133)

Finally, the focus on collaboration and integrative solutions often shortchanges disputants, says Mayer, who may be “neither interested in nor ready to seek a collaborative outcome” (p. 31). In fact, “People in conflict are often worried that the collaborative processes in which they are urged to participate will require them to give up something of basic value or to cooperate with what they believe to be evil or malicious” (p. 31).

If the field of conflict resolution is going to have real impact and real scope, says Mayer, theorists and practitioners need to make some fundamental shifts in how they think about and work with conflict. First and foremost, this means dropping the bias towards resolution and instead, shifting the focus to helping people engage with conflict. It also means moving beyond the traditional emphasis on rationality to allow for – and even support – passionate advocacy and strong expressions of strong emotions. Finally, it means a greater emphasis on helping people to live and work with fundamental differences rather than seeking to dispel those differences through collaborative or consensus-building efforts.

Recommending that mediators “redefine ourselves as conflict engagement specialists” (p. 39), Mayer writes:
In view of the challenges to our field and the nature of the conflict process itself, the identification of our field with the resolution of conflict seems short-sighted and inaccurate. People involved in conflict need assistance during many other parts of the conflict process – in preventing conflict, understanding that there is potential conflict, raising that conflict to the level of awareness, escalating a conflict to the point where some response is provoked, conducting and carrying on a conflict until resolution is possible, engaging in a conflict resolution process, coming to resolution, healing from conflict. (pp. 38-39)

The theoretical perspectives offered by these scholars suggest a new direction about how to work with difference and conflict. More specifically, they argue for strategies that accept difference as ineradicable, at least in some situations, and thus focus more on how to engage with and live with difference than on how to resolve it. In addition, they argue for strategies that acknowledge the emotionality of conflict and thus create space to express and work with the emotions involved. These ideas are particularly relevant to working with parties engaged in conflict involving identity-based issues, parties who may resist traditional strategies because they are perceived as asking them to compromise who they are and/or because they fail to address emotional trauma that is perpetuating the conflict. However, these theorists leave the question of what these strategies look like in practice largely unanswered.

Based on an analysis of the Bridging the Religious Divide dialogue project in Salt Lake City, this paper identifies four discursive tactics that help put these strategies into practice. Before describing these practices, however, this paper first examines how the use of traditional conflict resolution strategies failed to help address the dispute over the Main Street Plaza and the religious divide that fueled it.
CHAPTER 7

ANALYSIS OF THE PUBLIC HEARING PROCESS FOR
THE MAIN STREET PLAZA DISPUTE

Since Salt Lake City first proposed selling a block of Main Street to the LDS Church for the construction of a plaza in 1999, until the city council approved the plan to resolve the dispute over that sale by relinquishing its pedestrian easement in 2003, numerous public hearings were held to invite public input and exchange on the issue. More specifically, public meetings on the proposed sale included: a number of open meetings sponsored by city and church officials with neighborhood groups; two public hearings before the Salt Lake City Planning Commission; and a hearing before the Salt Lake City Council. Public meetings on the disposition of the plaza after the 2002 10th Circuit Court of Appeals ruling prohibiting church-imposed restrictions on speech, conduct and dress included: a 3-hour public hearing before the Salt Lake City Council (that was broadcast on local radio and television); numerous meetings sponsored by the Salt Lake City mayor’s office with affected neighborhood councils; a 5-hour hearing before the Salt Lake City Planning Commission; and two hearings before the Salt Lake City Council. This significant list of meetings and hearings suggests that the public was given ample opportunity to provide input and have exchange on issues associated with the creation and later disposition of the Main Street Plaza. This paper argues, however, that this public deliberation process did little to address public contention associated with the
sale and disposition of the Main Street Plaza. In fact, this paper argues that for some residents, the hearing process exacerbated public antagonism between Mormons and non-Mormons. Using the theoretical discussion outlined in Chapter 5 as a foundation, this chapter analyzes why this was so.

First of all, the public deliberation process exacerbated the religious divide for many citizens because the parties involved lacked a common grammar and the process failed to provide opportunity to consciously negotiate – or at least try to negotiate – a common grammar. This meant that words and actions often had very different meanings for different parties. As a result, disputants misunderstood each other’s words and actions. Worse, people often felt dismissed, and even repudiated, by the words and actions of others.

During the Main Street Plaza dispute, for example, both Mormons and non-Mormons used the word “community.” The word, however, often had very different meanings within the social reality of each group. These meanings were grounded in the larger narratives (discussed earlier in this paper) that Mormons and non-Mormons told about Salt Lake City and their place in that community. These stories were incommensurate – they did not map onto each other – and thus the meaning for each group of the word “community” was incommensurate. Thus, when either group used the word “community” it tended to make the other feel ignored, dismissed or repudiated.

Speaking about the value of the LDS Church-constructed plaza, for example, Lance Wickman, general counsel for the LDS Church, said, “Our view is that the plaza from the beginning has been a blessing and a benefit to the whole community. This was a community effort to benefit the entire community [italics added]” (Snyder, 2003).
Similarly, in arguing for the extinguishment of the easement, Wickman said, "The spirit of community [italics added], which the plaza symbolizes and always has from its inception, is best fostered by that result. We don't think it's fostered by the continuation of the situation that allows protests and contention out there on the plaza" (Snyder, 2003).

Wickman used the word "community" within a larger worldviewing narrative that sees Salt Lake City primarily as a place founded and developed by Mormons as the spiritual center of their religion and that sees the Salt Lake Temple and the plaza next to it as the heart of that center. Within this narrative, the construction of a beautifully-landscaped plaza in the heart of the city that connects the Salt Lake Temple and the LDS Church Office Building is indeed a gift to the community. But for many non-Mormons who held a different worldviewing narrative about Salt Lake City, Wickman's use of the word "community" left them feeling dismissed and excluded. This was particularly true because Wickman's use of the word was couched in all-inclusive terms ("the whole community" and "the entire community"), leaving no place for people who may have opposed the church's acquisition and development of the Main Street Plaza.

Similarly, the use of the word "community" by ACLU attorney Stephen Clark, undoubtedly left many members of the LDS Church feeling ignored or dismissed. While speaking for the ACLU and other plaintiffs who challenged the use restrictions on the plaza, Clark said that "Main Street is not only a traditional public forum entitled to the highest degree of First Amendment protections, but it is also a symbol of community central to the 'marketplace of ideas' that has played such a critical role in our nation's history" (ACLU, 2001). Clark uses the word "community" within a larger worldviewing
narrative that primarily sees Salt Lake City – or any city – as a place made vibrant by the interaction, and even clash, of a multiplicity of cultures. Within this worldview, the property lying between the LDS Temple and the Church Office Building has more value to the community as a city street where diverse people encounter and interact with each other, than as a church-owned and controlled plaza. Members of the LDS Church who held a different worldviewing narrative about Salt Lake City, however, were left feeling ignored or dismissed by Clark’s use of the word “community.”

More specifically, it appears that a lack of common grammar may be responsible – at least in part – for the initial misunderstanding between LDS Church representatives and at least some members of the Salt Lake City Council about the nature of the plaza the church proposed to construct on Main Street. Tom Rogan, one of the two city council members who voted against the sale of Main Street, said for example, “People were accepting as a given that it would be a park and the restrictions would be those that apply to a park” (May, 2003, November 30). In Rogan’s grammar, it was understood that the proposed plaza would be like a “park” and that “park” meant a public gathering place like other city parks. Church representatives, however, say they represented the plaza as an expansion of Temple Square, and when they used the word “park” it meant that the plaza would look physically like a park, but not that it would have the same status as a park (Snyder, 2002, November 17). Reflecting the incommensurability of the grammars involved, LDS Church counsel Wickman said, “I’m mystified as to why this has been a controversy at all. It was always understood between those negotiating that this is what it was going to be” (May, 2002, November 17).
A second – and arguably more important – reason that the public process for deliberating the future of the Main Street Plaza exacerbated the religious divide is that the dialectical nature of the process made both Mormons and non-Mormons feel that their identity was under attack. As a result, both Mormons and non-Mormons often felt compelled to take a defensive stance, asserting and defending their own worldview and thus, reinforcing the religious divide.

As discussed earlier in this paper, the Main Street Plaza became a symbol to both Mormons and non-Mormons of their beliefs, or worldview. For most Mormons, the Main Street Plaza was sacred ground, and ensuring the LDS Church’s ability to impose restrictions on speech, dress and conduct was essential to protecting Salt Lake City as a safe haven for Mormons to practice their religious beliefs without harassment. In contrast, for most non-Mormons, Main Street was a place where everyone should be welcome – no matter what their beliefs – and allowing diverse expressions of speech, dress and behavior was essential to preserving Salt Lake City as a place where non-Mormons had a voice. In other words, the struggle over what to do with the plaza was not simply a dispute over what to do with a piece of property. It was a struggle between two groups of people over whose worldview – or identity – would be privileged and whose would be marginalized. For some, it might have even felt like a struggle over their right or ability to exist.

The dialectical nature of the public deliberation process exacerbated the religious divide in Salt Lake City because it amplified this struggle. Rather than creating a place where both worldviews could be acknowledged, and even held and explored simultaneously despite their contradictions, the public hearings established an
environment where worldviews were in competition with each other. This was because the public meetings were largely structured as an opportunity to try to persuade decision-makers to support a particular resolution to the plaza dispute. As a result, citizens felt compelled to assert and defend a particular *position*, one protective of their worldview.

The public hearings and meetings on the Main Street Plaza dispute, for example, generally began with someone providing a history of the dispute and an overview of the different alternative solutions that were under consideration – the LDS demand that the city relinquish the easement, the ACLU proposal for time, place and manner restrictions, and the mayor’s “peace plan.” Then, the people attending the meeting were given a limited number of minutes to speak at some governing body or representative who was part of the decision-making structure. As a result, the meetings were generally perceived as an opportunity to voice one’s support or opposition for a particular position in order to sway the decision-makers towards one’s point of view. There was rarely, if ever, an opportunity in the public hearings for the people attending the hearing to *speak with each other* about the dispute or about the different worldviews that informed their positions on that dispute. One resident who complained about this dynamic at her community council meeting said:

> Basically we were presented with three choices: the Mayor’s proposal, time, place and manner regulations, and do nothing. We were given two minutes to speak. There ended up being no real *discussion*. People just offered the usual platitudes defending their position. There was never an opportunity to discuss what time, place and manner might mean to the community. Or to explain what the mayor’s proposal would mean to the people in this neighborhood. (personal interview, April 19, 2003)

As a result, she said, “people were basically voting for or against the church” (personal interview, April 19, 2003).
The structure of the public meetings can be considered dialectical because it encouraged the presentation of opposing viewpoints for the purpose of eventually resolving the difference between those viewpoints by selecting one over the other, or collapsing them into some form of compromise. The innate structure of dialectical discourse encourages the presentation of positions in binary terms: right and wrong, true and untrue, us and them. Similarly, it encourages the assertion of positions and the presentation of rhetorical argument about why those positions should prevail. In dialectical discourse, people tend to speak at others, as they argue for and argue against and promote and condemn. There are often claims to universal absolutes, or “the facts,” and the use of universalizing terms, such as “we” or “the people,” as parties seek to collapse the contradictions in their direction.

The innate structure of dialectical discourse is divisive. It discourages disputants from seeking to view or understand a conflict more holistically, that is, from considering the issues involved in a problem – or the social realities underlying those issues – from a vantage point outside their own position. Rather, it encourages disputants to occupy the social realities they already know and to re-assert the positions that gave rise to the conflict. As a result, dialectical discourse tends to exacerbate and intensify conflict, especially perhaps, conflict involving identity.

Finally, the public hearings exacerbated the religious divide in Salt Lake City for many people because they failed to create any space to acknowledge, much less address, the experience of past emotional trauma that both Mormons and non-Mormons have felt at the hands of the other. Rather, the hearings served to replay those traumas, as some people felt that their deepest values were being ignored, dismissed or repudiated.
It was clear, for example, from comments made by both Mormons and non-Mormons during the hearings that many members of both groups felt hurt by and/or angry at the other, and that the source of that hurt and/or anger included experiences that predated the Main Street Plaza dispute. The structure of the public hearings, however, created little or no space for these feelings to be expressed, much less worked with. Participants were discouraged from speaking about emotional feelings by the inherent emphasis on rationality or “giving reasons” for their position. They were also discouraged by the structure of the meetings to even speak with each other. In fact, when someone occasionally tried to talk about the emotional landscape and speak directly to others in the audience, the structure of the hearings provided no meaningful space for others to join them. For example, at one public hearing, a speaker commented that after reviewing hundreds of comments on a web site about the Main Street Plaza dispute he concluded that what the issue was really about was non-Mormons not feeling welcome, or loved, by Mormons. “I just want to tell you,” he said, “that I love you all” (Salt Lake City Council meeting videotape, 2002). Because the podium provided for public speakers faced the city council members, however, he spoke the words into anonymous space with his back turned towards the rows of his fellow residents.

In conclusion, for many if not most residents, the public deliberation process created to address the Main Street plaza dispute only underscored the feelings of Mormons and non-Mormons alike that their identity was under attack and that their only choice was to take a defensive posture. Furthermore, it created little space to acknowledge, much less address, the emotionally traumatic experiences of both sides that helped to create, and perpetuate, the religious divide that underlay the Main Street Plaza
dispute. Rather, the public deliberation process served to reinforce and replay those traumas, leaving people feeling unheard by each other, dismissed and even repudiated.
CHAPTER 8

ANALYSIS OF THE BRIDGING THE RELIGIOUS DIVIDE
SMALL GROUP DIALOGUE PROCESS

Two years after the Salt Lake City Council held its last public hearing on the Main Street Plaza dispute, a different kind of public exchange was initiated in Salt Lake City. This was the Bridging the Religious Divide small group dialogue project. Under the initiative, 13 small groups – each comprised of 8 to 10 citizens with a diversity of religious orientations – met at least four times over a 6-month period. Some groups met more frequently. Some continued to meet far beyond the designated half year period. All groups were facilitated by a trained facilitator. The stated purpose of the initiative was simple. It was to “have a conversation” across religious differences and to explore whatever issues, feelings and concerns emerged between group members.

The Bridging the Religious Divide small group dialogue project had its limits. The project involved only about 120 citizens. Many voices from the community were absent, including people who do not believe there is a religious divide in Salt Lake City and those who may have felt too angry or apathetic to feel it was worth talking. Despite efforts to ensure that every group included citizens of diverse backgrounds, a couple of groups were lacking rich diversity. Some participants felt that the process was too short. Some groups found it difficult to meet on a regular basis over the summer.
For many participants, however, the Bridging the Religious small group dialogue process was transformative. Some found the experience life-altering. Most participants came away with new insights and expanded perspectives. Perhaps most significant, the process transformed how many participants related to difference and to “the other.” More specifically, the process fostered a renewed sense of community between many Mormons and non-Mormons, in many cases transforming antagonism to agonism, and even to warm friendship. The process also helped some participants heal past trauma and turn back toward their ideals of community, and to each other.

Based on an analysis of the small group dialogue process, this paper argues that four discursive practices played an important role in fostering these changes: interactive approach, dialogic structure, affective ambiance, and narrative focus. This chapter discusses each of these practices, first providing a brief theoretical discussion, and then describing how the discursive practice served to produce more agonistic relationships and to help many participants move beyond the emotional trauma that had caused them to turn away from the other.

Interactive approach

Most traditional approaches to conflict resolution tend to assume that disputants are operating within the same, or substantially similar, worldviews or social realities. Docherty (2001) writes, for example, that “The impression is that negotiation, mediation, and other conflict resolution processes take place within an uncontested, given reality” (p. 55). Yet conflict scholars agree that many conflicts emerge because of, or are substantially complicated by, the presence of divergent worldviews or social realities. Furthermore, they agree that efforts to resolve even simple disputes are likely to fail if
worldview differences exist and are not acknowledged and addressed in some way (Daniels & Walker, 2001; Docherty, 2001; Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). As Docherty (2001) writes, “When parties have not adequately managed their worldview differences and similarities, even the smallest problem can block agreement” (p. 53). Similarly, Daniels and Walker (2001) observe:

The complexity of a conflict certainly increases when it is driven by people’s fundamental values – about right and wrong, about entitlements, about humans’ role in nature, and so on. Parties will not agree to outcomes that contradict their worldviews and may make little progress until they understand one another’s value orientations and regard them as legitimate. (p. 43)

But what does it mean to “manage” worldview differences? Docherty (2001), who contends that the tragedy at Waco resulted, at least in part, from the parties’ failure to manage their worldview differences, says that managing worldview differences requires that parties “name the world cooperatively” (p. 152). More specifically, Docherty argues that parties who are able to manage their worldview differences do more than simply “share information” or establish “positive rapport” (p. 135). Rather, they “cooperatively exercise worldnaming power to build a shared reality and name a negotiable problem” (p. 135). Docherty describes worldnaming power as the capacity to “define what is good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable, right or wrong,” (Ramesh, as cited in Docherty, 1997, p. 135). To cooperatively exercise worldnaming power, she says, parties must let go of worldnaming control, or the effort to unilaterally “label events/acts/people”” (Ramesh, as cited in Docherty, 1997, p. 45). In other words, parties who successfully manage their worldview differences negotiate meaning together, rather than trying to impose meaning on each other.
Docherty (2001) emphasizes, however, that successfully managing worldview differences does not mean reconciling or converging worldviewing narratives. Rather, she writes, it is about parties learning to negotiate, or navigate through multiple worlds. This means that parties come to share enough meaning that they can communicate across worldview differences. “Parties need not share an image of the world,” writes Docherty (p. 135). In fact, she points out, parties may continue to disagree about aspects of their respective images of the world. However, parties “must share enough meaning that each can articulate the other’s naming of the world even if they continue to disagree over the nature of reality” (p. 135).

This paper argues that the Bridging the Religious Divide small group dialogue project helped to foster agonistic relationships between Mormons and non-Mormons in part because the project created opportunities for the participants to manage their worldview differences rather than to simply debate them. More specifically, in both the planning and implementation of the project, participants were given the opportunity to cooperatively exercise worldnaming power as they jointly defined the world in which they would interact. As a result, the participants were able to create a space for interaction that acknowledged different worldviews, rather than privileging one over another. This opportunity is particularly important in conflicts driven by a clash of divergent worldviews, as a major issue in such conflicts is whose worldview will be privileged and whose will be marginalized.

The citizens advisory committee that helped to design the project, for example, met for several months before the project was initiated. In the initial meetings, the conversation focused more on how people in the room perceived each other and wanted
to be treated by each other than on what the Bridging the Religious Divide project should look like. While a few people grew impatient with these exchanges and dropped out of the committee, most felt they were an essential first step towards any effort that might authentically help to bridge the religious divide. In fact, at one point, one citizen said to the mayor, “I don’t see how we are going to create a project to bridge the religious divide if we can’t do it in this room. This group needs to be the process” (PAC, June 2, 2004).

A major issue underlying these exchanges was an issue that was also central to the dispute over the Main Street Plaza (and for that matter, central to most disputes involving divergent worldviews): Whose worldview will be privileged here, and whose will be marginalized? Or, can we figure out a way that we can both be here? In more personal terms, this issue might be framed as: Is there space for me here? Will I be acknowledged – and respected – for who I am and what I believe? Or are others going to ignore, dismiss or even repudiate my reality? In the initial meeting of the advisory committee, for example, a non-Mormon woman blurted out:

Power is the 3000 pound gorilla in this room. . . . I feel that many in the Mormon Church think they know what is best for me. And I feel that they are not willing to listen to my goals, my passions, or my faith. They want to control things. I fear they are only willing to participate in this effort up to point where it does not threaten their power. (PAC, June 2, 2004)

Later, a Mormon commented:

I have only one hope and that is that we can find a way to have more respect for each other. Maybe I understand the power issue. But I am not sure we can do anything about it. But let’s try to not injure one another. Listen, I mow my lawn and I like to talk to people. But some people just walk by me. It’s as if I am invisible. Why? Because I look like a conservative guy? Because people can tell that I am LDS? (PAC, June 2, 2004)
Another Mormon added:

I don’t understand this issue about power. I’m just a person trying to make it through the day. I’m LDS. I don’t feel like I have power. (PAC, June 2, 2004)

In another meeting of the advisory committee, the following exchange took place:

Non-Mormon: You believe that you have the one true faith. That seems to mean that what I believe isn’t true.

Mormon: I want to respond. I think our objective here can’t be to change doctrine.

Non-Mormon: But can’t you see how that changes our relationship?

Mormon: You could respect my beliefs. But I see how that can be injurious to you. Maybe we can just set it aside.

Non-Mormon: I can interact with you on lots of levels without going there. But if we get to know each other better, we might need to go there (PAC, June 2, 2004).

While such exchanges may sound difficult, they allowed participants to cooperatively exercise worldnaming power as they interactively defined how each would see and treat the other. In Docherty’s (2001) terms, these kinds of exchanges served to do more than share information or build rapport. They served to negotiate a social reality in which the various parties could speak and act together. Furthermore, the social reality that eventually emerged did not represent a convergence of worldviewing narratives. Rather, it reflected a willingness by the parties involved to let go of worldnaming control – or the effort to unilaterally label events/acts/people – and to acknowledge the existence of worldviewing narratives that were different than their own. One participant observed after a meeting, for example, that another participant “felt that my comments were an attack on religious beliefs. It was very useful for me to hear how hurtful it was” (personal interview, August 29, 2004). “I’m learning that we just need to keep talking,” noted
another after the same meeting. "We need to be a community in dialogue across our
differences. There are power differentials. But we need to listen for the other" (personal
interview, August 24, 2004). Yet another participant reflected, "It was a gift to simply
have people show up, sit around the table, and stay through the conversation. There was
light in it" (personal interview, August 25, 2004).

In later meetings, the focus of exchange shifted to the purpose of the Bridging the
Religious Divide project and what form it should take. Differences over these issues
tended to fall along Mormon/non-Mormon lines and to reflect worldviewing differences
about the importance of community versus individuality, as well as the value of social
harmony versus dissension. Mormon participants, for example, suggested that the project
focus on: commonality; how to create a more respectful community; and raising
community spirit. Along these same lines, Mormon participants recommended initiatives
that involved the community in some sort of joint community-building activity, such as
dinner parties, street clubs, neighborhood parties or volunteer work projects. In contrast,
non-Mormon participants said the project needed to celebrate difference, acknowledge
the elephant in the room and create space for all the voices. For the most part, non-
Mormon participants promoted creating opportunities for direct talk between Mormons
and non-Mormons. One person even suggested that the advisory group’s conversations
become the focus of a short film that could serve as a catalyst for future discussions by
others.

Eventually, the committee coalesced around the idea of holding several public
forums and then organizing small dialogue groups. Even after reaching agreement on
these initiatives, however, the committee spent a considerable amount of time debating
what questions to pose at the forums. The question, “How to create a more respectful community?” was rejected after advisory committee members realized that they did not fully agree on what respect looked like. Similarly, “What would you do to personally to unite our community?” was discarded after some members pointed out that unity was not necessarily a goal that all agreed with. At times, these exchanges frustrated some advisory committee members. But again, these exchanges served a critical role by allowing participants to cooperatively exercise worldnaming power and to build a shared reality. What is important to recognize is that the participants of the advisory committee were not only negotiating over the purpose and form of the project in these exchanges. As in their earlier discussion, they were again negotiating over whether one of their worldviews would be privileged or whether both their worldviews would be acknowledged, and in some way, accommodated. In other words, they were negotiating whether each of them was willing to let go of world-naming control and instead, cooperatively name the world in which they would interact.

The small group dialogues also provided participants with the opportunity to cooperatively exercise worldnaming power. This occurred in at least two important ways. First, most of the facilitators initiated their dialogue group by giving the participants an opportunity to make agreements about how they wanted to talk with each other. In most cases, the facilitators did not recommend potential agreements, but rather, invited participants to share their own ideas. The opportunity to create such agreements was a small gesture in some ways, but an important one. It sent a message from the very beginning of the dialogue groups that the participants themselves – not some outside authority – would be responsible for defining, or naming, the world in which they would
speak and listen to each other. In addition, it created the understanding that that world
would be jointly or cooperatively named. This simple act encouraged the parties to create
a space where they could manage worldviews rather than struggle over whose worldview
would be privileged.

Second, the agreements that were adopted went beyond predictable ground rules
about not interrupting and sharing time. They also addressed the spirit or attitude that
participants hoped would infuse their exchanges. Repeatedly, this spirit reflected a desire
to create a space where divergent worldviews could be honestly spoken and heard without
one party trying to unilaterally label events, acts or people. One group’s agreements, for
example, were: Speak honestly. Agree to disagree. No proselytizing. Let others know if
they are speaking in a way that offends you. (You can simply say “ouch” to alert them.
Then unfold that “ouch.”) Share air time. Come with good intentions. Such agreements
allowed the participants to then enter into exchanges where they explained, explored,
reacted to, asked questions about and even sometimes challenged their different ways of
seeing and being in the world. In other words, such agreements allowed parties to enter
into exchanges where they cooperatively exercised worldnaming power even as they
acknowledged each other’s divergent ways of seeing and being in the world.

Dialogic structure

Communication scholars generally trace the theoretical work on dialogic
discourse back to a number of key scholars. Among those most often mentioned are
Martin Buber, Gadamer, Bakhtin and Bohm. Inherent in the ideas laid out by these
thinkers is a view that “human meaning-making is irreducibly social, relational and
interactional in character” (Stewart, Zediker & Black, 2004, p. 21), and that “selves and
relationships are constituted in communication” (Baxter, 2004, p. 109). These scholars generally reject a “monadic view of self” (p. 108) which sees self as a “unitary, autonomous phenomena” (p. 109). Similarly, they generally renounce a view of communication as merely the transmission of internally located meaning. Rather, they tend to see self and other as inextricably interdependent and involved in each other’s constitution. Furthermore, they view meaning as produced collaboratively in interaction.

Buber, for example, who “consistently equated human life with dialogic meeting” (Anderson, Baxter & Cissna, 2004, p. 3) argued that the “I does not develop apart from its link with an acknowledged other, a thou or you, toward whom the I turns with attention” (p. 3). Similarly, Gadamer asserted that “meanings are not reproduced by ‘receivers’ but produced collaboratively and dialogically by communicators who are simultaneously and prototypically speakers and listeners questioning the nature of shifting ‘texts’” (p. 6). Bakhtin saw both self and society as “inherently and forever multivocal and unfinalizable” (p. 4), insisting that every utterance is always “responsive, always-already implicated in the discourse context that frames it” (Stewart et al., 2004, p. 27). According to Bohm, individual selves, as well as all items comprising physical reality, are not really separate objects, but rather part of “an undivided whole that is in perpetual dynamic flux” (Keepin as cited in Stewart et al., 2004, p. 24). Similarly, he argued that “dialogue must be understood as a holistic process enveloping interlocuters, rather than as the sum of interactions between fragmented participants” (Stewart et al., 2004, p. 24).

According to Stewart et al., (2004), these scholars also share an underlying commitment to the interrelated concepts of wholeness and tensionality. Each scholar, they argue, “urged his readers to balance Enlightenment tendencies toward analysis,
separation, and categorization with attempts to be aware of and understand a totality, a whole” (p. 23). Furthermore, each saw this whole as “centrally marked by both a complementary and contradictory quality that renders it inherently fluid and dynamic” (p. 27). The authors give the example of Bohm who, as noted above, not only argued that physical reality was an undivided whole rather than a collection of separate objects, but also asserted that “‘This undivided whole is not static but rather in a constant state of flow and change”’ (Keepin as cited in Stewart et al., 2004, p. 28). Other scholars give the example of Bakhtin, who argued for “the motivocal constitution of human experience” (Anderson et al., 2004, p. 7), and who characterized language as the interplay of centripetal and centrifugal forces (Bakhtin, 1981).

These themes – attention to the totality or whole as well as its tensional parts, and an appreciation of human thinking, speaking and listening as social and cultural intersubjective acts – continue to inform much of the current theorizing about, as well as praxis of, dialogic discourse. Isaacs (1999), for example, argues that dialogue “asks us to listen for an already existing wholeness,” a wholeness that can be discovered only if “we listen deeply to all the views that people may express” (p. 20). Wood (2005) writes that dialogue is characterized by a “refusal to privilege any single voice, perspective, or ideology. It insists upon the superiority of multivocality” (p. xx). Similarly, Anderson, Baxter and Cissna (2004) describe dialogue “as a conversation of voices in tension . . . the embodied ‘voices’ of different people, and the verbal-ideological ‘voices’ of different perspectives, values or ideas” where “the utterance isn’t owned by one speaker or voice but is multivocal” (p. 261).
In praxis, this attention to the whole and its tensional parts often manifests in efforts to create spaces where disparate voices are brought into conversation together, not for the purpose of resolving differences, but for the purpose of unfolding and better understanding them. Isaacs (1999), for example, who facilitates dialogue in business and community settings, writes that the purpose of his efforts is to create settings in which people with different languages, assumptions, ways of thinking and acting can bring out these differences and begin to make sense of them. Similarly, the Public Conversation Project, which organizes dialogues usually between parties with opposing views on controversial issues, write that they are trying to facilitate “a conversation in which people who have different beliefs and perspectives seek to develop mutual understanding” (Herzig & Chasin, 2006, p. 3). Another example is the Public Dialogue Consortium, a nonprofit organization that facilitates community dialogue on controversial issues. Pearce and Pearce (2004) describe the goal of such dialogues as inviting “people to speak in a manner that others want to listen, and to listen in such a way that others want to speak” (p. 46).

The focus in these dialogic efforts is on creating space for the whole, with all its tensional parts. This means encouraging participants to speak honestly about their own experiences, beliefs and perspectives while at the same time listening deeply to the experiences, beliefs and perspectives of others. Pearce and Pearce (2004), who organized the Public Dialogue Consortium, describe dialogic communication as “remaining in the tension between standing your own ground and being profoundly open to the other” (p. 46). They write:

The defining characteristics of dialogic communication is that all of these speech acts are done in ways that hold one’s own position but allow others
Similarly, practitioners with the Public Conversation Project counsel participants in dialogue sessions to “speak as individuals, from their own unique experience” (Herzig & Chasin, 2006, p. 139), but at the same time, to “listen with resilience, ‘hanging in’ when something is hard to hear” (p. 9).

Theorists and practitioners alike stress that dialogue is not about reaching agreement, although agreement – usually partial and temporary – may sometimes emerge. Rather, it is about unfolding and engaging difference in a way that allows voices, including those that disagree, to be present. As a result, theorists and practitioners also emphasize that dialogic discourse neither idealizes nor necessarily strives to establish common ground (e.g., Wood, 2004). In fact, some scholars of dialogue argue that an effort to find commonality actually discourages genuine dialogic exchange, as it reduces communication to message-transmission-reception, and reproduces the status quo (e.g., Bohm, 1996; Deetz & Simpson, 2004). Wood (2004) writes, for example:

The search for (and belief in) common ground may thwart, rather than facilitate, genuine dialogue, because almost inevitably the dominant culture defines what ground is common or legitimate. Rather than the reproductive goal of finding ‘common ground’ or ‘resolving differences’, dialogue allows differences to exist without trying to resolve, overcome, synthesize or otherwise tame them. (pp. xvii-iii)

Similarly, Deetz and Simpson (2004) write:

Calls for “coming together’ and “finding common ground’ de facto reproduce the status quo because the ground that is common between participants is that of the dominant culture. This inhibits, rather than supports, the radical disruption of the self that is central to our productive understanding of dialogue. (p. 145)

Some theorists say that it is the willingness to hold the disparate parts of the whole in tension – without trying to collapse into commonality or synthesize them into
unity – that makes dialogue productive or transformative. This is because holding the tension of difference, rather than resolving it, can allow new meanings to emerge, as well as new relationships. In this way, dialogic discourse differs from other forms of discourse that are dialectical, such as debate. As noted earlier in this paper, dialectical discourse encourages the presentation of opposing viewpoints for the purpose of eventually resolving the difference between those viewpoints by selecting one over the other, or collapsing them into some form of compromise or synthesis. As a result, it largely encourages interlocuters to occupy the social realities they already know as they assert and defend their positions. Dialogic discourse, however, while encouraging interlocutors to speak their own truth, also encourages them to remain open to hearing the truths of others, while residing in the dynamic tension that results. In other words, dialogic discourse encourages interlocutors to adopt a sort of suspended stance, one in which they hold all voices or parts of the discourse as a whole in tension, without trying to collapse or synthesize the parts into a simplified unity. As Wood (2004) writes, dialogic discourse means that:

We allow – perhaps even embrace – tension between our perspectives and those of others, which may challenge and change our own. In conversation, we resist tendencies to reconcile or synthesize perspectives, much less to choose between them. Instead, we wrestle with the discomfort that comes from lack of closure and lack of unquestionable right answers. (p. xvii)

Holding the disparate parts of the whole in tension creates the potential for something new to emerge. As Anderson, Baxter and Cissna (2004) write, “Dialogue is characterized by mystery and surprise, creating something unforseen. The core idea here is that meaning is emergent, in the moments of meeting between people” (p. 260). At a minimum, listening deeply to another while holding one’s own perspective – or
worldview – in suspension often facilitates a much deeper and more authentic understanding of that other. It may also foster a willingness to acknowledge, or validate, the social reality of the other, even if that social reality is divergent from one’s own. In addition, it can cause one to reflect more critically about one’s own worldview. Self-reflection may mean a greater awareness about how one’s worldview affects others, and that awareness may lead to behavioral changes in how one acts towards that other. Self-reflection may even induce one to alter one’s perspective.

Perhaps most significant, however, the experience of holding the disparate parts of the whole in tension during dialogic discourse can produce new ways to hold and relate to difference and thus, to the other. And since one’s own self is defined, at least in part, in relation to the other, dialogic discourse can produce new ways to hold and understand one’s own self. Deetz and Simpson (2004) describe the productive or transformational potential of dialogue this way:

Most acts of everyday communication are reproductive in the sense that we trade or share routinized information about what we already “know.” Occasionally, though, the routine is radically disrupted and the excess of the other over our determination of it calls out for reconceptualization and redetermination. Otherness is encountered and our experience is transformed from routine to extraordinary and meanings become “ours” in a more radical sense. We reserve the concept dialogue to designate the productive (rather than the reproductive) communication processes enabling these radical transformations. We believe that this process is what pulls together the great communication theories of dialogue. This is Buber’s (1958) encounter with Th oness that overcomes calcified understandings of it, and Gadamer’s (1975) conception formation in the great piece of literature or art. (p. 144)

This brief theoretical discussion about dialogue reveals why dialogic discourse offers a potentially useful strategy for intervening in conflicts involving identification with incommensurate worldviews. As noted earlier in this paper, disputants involved in
such conflicts may feel that traditional conflict resolution strategies which emphasize finding common or at least compatible interests are asking them to give up, or compromise, the beliefs and values that define their worldview and thus, their identity. As a result, they may adopt a self-protective posture, defending more fiercely the beliefs and values that define their worldview and even attacking others who are perceived as a threat.

Dialogic discourse, however, creates a space where parties are not asked to give up or compromise the divergent worldviews that define them. Rather, each person is encouraged to speak from and about his or her worldview. At the same time, each person is asked to listen deeply to the worldviews of others. In other words, dialogic discourse creates a space where the whole, and all its tensional parts, can be present – at least temporarily.

As a result, dialogic discourse can help transform antagonistic relations into agonistic ones. This is because dialogic discourse encourages an enhanced understanding of the other, a willingness to acknowledge and show respect for the other, and a greater awareness of how one’s own attitudes and actions affect the other. Perhaps most important, however, it is because dialogic discourse allows participants to enact, rather than to simply think about, more agonistic ways of relating to difference and to the other.

This paper argues that another significant reason that the Bridging the Religious Divide small group dialogue project helped to foster more agonistic relationships between Mormons and non-Mormons is that the project encouraged dialogic discourse between the parties. More specifically, it argues that such discourse not only fostered understanding, respect and greater self-awareness among participants, it also produced
new ways of holding difference for the participants and thus, new ways of relating to the other and to the self.

When the mayor of Salt Lake City initiated the small group dialogue project, the directions given to facilitators and participants were simple. The purpose of the project, said a spokesperson for the city, was not to analyze, debate or try to solve the Main Street Plaza dispute. Rather, it was “to have a conversation” or “to dialogue” about the religious divide. The spokesperson explained that what this meant in practice was up to the individual facilitators and participants. The city did encourage participants, however, to do two things: first, to speak honestly and personally about their experiences and feelings; and second, to listen deeply to each other, even when they heard things with which they might not agree.

In an effort to ensure that each group included a diversity of religious perspectives, the city also deliberately sorted participants into groups on the basis of their identified religious or nonreligious affiliation. In addition, each group was assigned a facilitator who was trained, at least to some degree, in dialogic approaches to discourse.

These elements helped to set the stage for dialogic discourse within the small groups. Most specifically, they helped to ensure that the focus of discussion was not on how to resolve the Main Street Plaza dispute, but on unfolding, exploring and holding the divergent worldviews that underlay the dispute. One group, for example, began its nine-month-long life with participants answering the question: “What are your core beliefs?” At their next meeting, they responded to the question, “How do you experience the religious divide in your own life?” And then, when they gathered again, they addressed, “What did you hear last time and how did you feel about it?” At this point, one
participant had observed that “It may not be possible to ever eliminate the differences that underlie the divide, so maybe we should be talking about how to live with them” (PDG, #11). Consequently, the group took up the question, “How do you make your way as you experience the divide in your own life? How do you negotiate difference?” This question led the participants in the group to revisit how they experience the divide in their own lives and to wrestle with the differences that existed between them in the room.

The conversations in this group and in other groups were not always easy. In fact, as participants narrated their different experiences and perspectives, the divergent worldviews that informed these experiences and perspectives were often brought into sharp relief. An example is the following exchange in which Mormon and non-Mormon participants describe how they experience living in Salt Lake City. The facilitator evoked the exchange by asking, “How do we deal with difference? How do we engage the other in a way that honors what we – and they – hold dear?”

_Mormon participant #1_: Mormons came here because we were persecuted. And we had certain values. And now the tables are turning as a large influx of people are coming in. We fear we will not have the city we wanted and we developed. . . . I would not go in to an Amish community and turn it upside down. It may sound like I am saying if you don’t like it, leave. That’s the last thing I want to say. But it is like we came here and have certain values and now people are coming and trying to turn that upside down.

_Facilitator_: So Mormons feel they came here to protect a certain way of life and they feel those who come are threatening the way of life they have chosen?

_Mormon participant #1_: Definitely.

_Facilitator_: I was unaware.

_Non-Mormon participant #2_: “I feel like what is being said is that if I am not Mormon, I do not have good moral values. I have lived in Utah all my life. . . . I grew up with a lot of pressure from Mormon children. As a
second grader, we always said prayer before class. The teacher said I went to the Bishop and he said you can’t fold your hands like that. A little thing like that – folding our hands because we were Catholic – this lady makes up this lie because she wanted everyone to do things on one side.

Non-Mormon participant #3: I was also born in Salt Lake City. I didn’t come here from the outside. It’s been my home for 70 years. For people to say I want to change them shows a lack of respect. Salt Lake City is 50% non-Mormon. All I look for is respect for my views and my values and they are not bad. My values and my beliefs I think are on a high level. But somehow, some Mormons seem to consider them watered down.

Facilitator: What you just said about Mormons having been persecuted. Settling here to avoid persecution. I can see why some people might fear having the community diluted.

Mormon participant #1: Not diluted. Turned upside down. But listen, I am here because a contractor came to me who is Catholic and told me about how LDS kids wouldn’t play with his kids. It really shocked me.

Non-Mormon participant #4: My granddaughter had that experience. She said, Grandma, why does everyone always ask me what my religion is?

Mormon participant #1: It’s a terrible reality. Salt Lake is probably the only place in the world where that gets asked. It happens to me. I’m building a house in Utah County. Twelve people drive up and they all ask, “Are you LDS?”

Facilitator: Why do you think they ask?

Mormon participant #1: It’s just easier, I guess.

Non-Mormon participant #5: I’m the one who is threatening everyone here. I’m the one. I’m an atheist, about as liberal as you get, almost an anarchist. I’m the person you don’t want to have around. I want to change the liquor laws. I am representative of the things you don’t want here.

Mormon participant #1: Oh no, I’m not talking about you. You are here, in this group, talking with me. Listen, I moved to a town in Wyoming... People said, there are four roads leading into this town and four leading out. I know what it is like to be asked to leave, and I didn’t like it. Don’t misunderstand me, I am not inviting you to leave. But if you want to be a liberal, why did you pick Salt Lake City to live in? Personally, I’d be inclined to go somewhere else where there are more people who agree with me.
Facilitator: I'd like to answer that question. I live here because I love it. I go to the mountains and get lost. It's an educated place. It's a place where I feel totally at home. And I don't want to threaten anyone's way of life either. I just want to live my own values (PDG, #1).

On first impression, one may read this exchange as argumentative. This paper maintains, however, that if one listens more deeply to the exchange, one can hear something else going on. More specifically, this paper contends that one can hear the parties struggling with how to hold divergent and often contradictory perspectives in the same space without denying the validity of any particular perspective and without trying to resolve the differences between them. Similarly, at first it may appear that the participants are not responding to the questions posed by the facilitator: "How do we deal with difference? How do we engage the other in a way that honors what we -- and they -- hold dear?" Again, however, this paper argues that if one listens more deeply, the participants are actually answering those questions by their willingness to speak their own experience honestly while listening openly to the experience of the other, even though the experience of the other may be contradictory to their own experience. In other words, the participants are willing to create space for the whole, with all its tensional parts, even though those parts may feel incommensurate.

Feedback from participants at the end of the project indicated that such exchanges, while sometimes difficult, produced more agonistic ways of understanding -- and of relating to -- other, self and the religious divide. More specifically, participant feedback indicates that the dialogic nature of the discourse fostered an enhanced understanding of the other, a willingness to acknowledge and show respect for the other and a greater awareness of how one's own attitudes and actions affected the other. Even more significant, however, this paper argues that participant feedback indicates that the dialogic
nature of the discourse allowed participants to actually *enact* more agonistic ways of holding difference and of relating to the other. Each of these outcomes is reviewed briefly below.

**Understanding**

By defining the purpose of the small group dialogues as "having a conversation" about the religious divide rather than trying to resolve it, the dialogue project created a space where people could speak and listen to each other dialogically rather than dialectically. This is because the focus on conversation rather than resolution created a space where multiple perspectives could be held at the same time rather than collapsed by the privileging of one perspective or through the synthesis of multiple perspectives. As a result, participants felt less compelled to try and persuade each other – or some decision-making body – about the validity or "rightness" of their position and were more willing to simply discuss the personal experiences and feelings that shaped their perspective on the divide. Similarly, the participants felt less compelled to listen to each other for the purpose of preparing a counter-argument and more willing to listen to each other simply to understand. In other words, the dialogic focus on conversation rather than resolution helped people to shift from *talking at* each other to *talking with* each other and from *listening to rebut* to *listening to understand*.

Such dialogic discourse fostered new understanding by Mormons and non-Mormons alike of each other's social reality – understandings which encouraged agonistic, rather than antagonistic relationships. In one group, for example, a non-Mormon woman described how her children were initially shunned by Mormon children when they moved into their neighborhood. Rather than disputing her experience, a
Mormon man responded by initiating conversations with his own neighbors to explore why such an incident might take place. He then reported his “findings” back to the group. He concluded by saying that he was so disturbed by the idea of any child feeling excluded that he was re-examining his own behavior as a parent to ensure that he was sending a message of inclusivity to his children. Similarly, after the subject of children feeling excluded was discussed in another group, another Mormon participant reflected, “We have so many activities for kids. Church is their social life. If you are not a member, I can see how you might feel rejected socially” (PDG, #13).

Comments by non-Mormon participants suggest they had reciprocal insights into LDS life. One non-Mormon commented, for example, “There are parallel concerns on both sides,” noting that “People of all backgrounds want their children to marry within their community to preserve their culture” (PDG, #11). After listening to a Mormon participant describe how members of the LDS Church originally came to Salt Lake City to escape persecution, another non-Mormon participant commented, “As I came to understand LDS history, I better understood the need for refuge and the fear of outsiders” (PDG, #1). Another non-Mormon participant observed, “Others’ intentions are often not what we assume. I came to understand that what I experienced as exclusion was actually an effort to protect something” (PDG, #11).

Acknowledgment

The dialogic character of the discourse in the small dialogue groups also fostered a willingness by both Mormons and non-Mormons to acknowledge the social reality – or worldview – of the other, even if they did not condone all of the beliefs or behaviors that
defined that worldview. This sense of acknowledgment also fostered more agonistic relationships, as Mormons and non-Mormons alike felt seen, accepted and validated.

The willingness to acknowledge the other – even though one might disagree with the other – also emerged from the dialogic nature of the conversational space established by the small group dialogue project. More specifically, the emphasis on “conversation” rather than resolution encouraged participants to suspend (at least for the moment) the human impulse to judgment and instead, to hold all points of view in tension as they engaged with others. This allowed participants to acknowledge the social reality of others even as they continued to hold divergent worldviews.

Sometimes acknowledgment was articulated in the form of a statement overtly recognizing the experience or feelings of another. At other times, acknowledgment was expressed as an invitation to an other to say more about their experience. Most often, acknowledgment showed up simply in the willingness to listen deeply. In one group, for example, a Mormon asked a non-Mormon participant who had self-identified as a gay person to share what it was like to be homosexual in Salt Lake City. In another group, a non-Mormon asked a Mormon if he would help her understand what it was like to consider oneself “a child of God.”

In the feedback provided by participants at the Harvesting meeting at the end of the project, many participants stressed how healing it was to simply have someone listen deeply as they spoke about their experiences and beliefs. “It’s significant how transforming it can be to have someone listen to you in empathy across the divide,” wrote one participant (PHW, November 12, 2005). “People need to be heard in a genuine and in-depth manner before solutions can be found,” wrote another, adding, “We must not
skip this stage” (PHW, November 12, 2005). Another participant commented, “I found how seriously you have to take the importance of just listening” (PHW, November 12, 2005). “I found there is healing through dialogue,” wrote another (PHW, November 12, 2005).

_Awareness_

The dialogic character of the discourse in the small dialogue groups also caused many participants to become more aware of the different worldviews present in the Salt Lake community, to realize that they held unconscious assumptions or stereotypes about others, and to wonder how they might live more respectfully with difference. The dialogues also prompted many participants to reflect on how their own worldview might be affecting others. Again, this awareness and self-reflection emerged because of the emphasis on conversation rather than resolution, and on holding all the parts in tension rather than trying to collapse them into some commonality.

When participants were asked at the end of the process, for example, “What were the most meaningful insights you gained?,” many described becoming more aware of the diversity of perspectives present in Salt Lake City. “I gained an awareness of just how many differing ‘peoples’ are in Salt Lake Valley that I didn’t know about,” said one participant (PHW, November 12, 2005). “I was stunned to realize how perceptions differ and how important it is not to assume everyone sees an event in the same way,” said another participant (PHW, November 12, 2005).

Similarly, many participants described becoming more aware of their own cultural assumptions and how those assumptions blinded them to the uniqueness and complexity of others. “This process helped me to break away from cultural biases I didn’t even know
I had,” said one participant. “For example, I knew nothing about the Wiccan faith. But although I knew nothing, I had stereotypes. If I even thought about it, I thought it was wicked in some way” (PDG, #6). Another commented, “Others intentions are often not what we assume” (PHW, November 12, 2005). Yet another person reflected, “It’s very easy to demonize a person who is not like you. It is very easy to make things black and white. These discussions made me see how stereotypes drive out any possibility of getting to know someone” (PDG, #11).

The dialogic nature of the discourse also compelled many participants to grapple with how to hold – or relate to – the differences they had become aware of, especially when those differences ran contrary to their own beliefs or way of being in the world. One person asked, for example, “How do we hold the contradiction between faith beliefs and act on one’s desire to respect other’s faiths?” (PHW, November 12, 2005). Another wondered, “What does it mean to love someone as a child of God? To honor their path? To allow them to be different without judgment?” (PHW, November 12, 2005). After one group struggled with how to bridge what seemed to be irreconcilable differences between different belief systems, one participant asked, “How do we get away from thinking, ‘Well, those guys are different!’ How to we get to a place where even though we don’t attend the same service, it’s still neighbor to neighbor? Just how do we get out and do that?” (PDG, #3). After a similar discussion in another group, someone asked the question, “Is there a place where you can hold your beliefs and I won’t be offended? Is there a way we can both be here?” (PDG, #1). In yet another group, a participant asked “How can we get past judging or critiquing? And if we cannot help judging, how do we respond to others after that?” (PDG, #12).
Finally, the dialogic nature of the discourse encouraged many participants to become aware of – and reflect upon – how their own beliefs and ways of being in the world affected others. “I realized we unintentionally contribute to the divide by our interaction, behavior and communication norms,” said one participant (PHW, November 12, 2005). “We need to become more aware of how what we say may be heard,” commented another. “We assume people are like us” (PHW, November 12, 2005). Yet another participant commented, “I don’t want to be the source of division or loss in my family or in other families over religion. I want to practice respect for another person’s vision for their life” (PHW, November 12, 2005).

Enacting more agonistic ways to hold difference

Most important, the dialogue groups not only fostered new ways to understand or to be aware of difference and the other. They also gave participants the opportunity to enact or perform a more agonistic way of relating to difference and the other. It is arguable that this opportunity to enact or perform a more agonistic way of relating to difference and the other was the most important element in transforming antagonistic relations to agonistic ones.

Agonistic relations are inherent in the structure of dialogic discourse. In contrast to many traditional conflict resolution strategies which seek to resolve difference by privileging one part, or to dissolve difference by compelling some sort of compromise between the parts, dialogic discourse seeks to acknowledge and hold difference by creating a space where the tensional parts may interact and engage with each other. In terms of the dialogue project, this took the form of creating a space where parties with divergent worldviews sought not to resolve or dissolve the differences between them, but
to simply speak and listen to each other respectfully across those differences. As a result, the project did not produce an agenda of potential actions that might “bridge the religious divide.” Rather, the small dialogue groups – through the simple act of speaking and listening to each other across difference – constructed the bridge. In other words, as participants grappled with how to speak and listen to each other across their divergent worldviews, they created the very reality they were wondering how to create. In this way, dialogic discourse is productive in a performative sense. It not only involves talk about how to hold difference in a new way; it produces a new way of holding difference. This new way involves speaking and listening to each other to understand difference, rather than to resolve it, and staying in relationship with each other despite divergent ways of seeing and being in the world.

Written feedback collected from participants at the Harvesting meeting reveals that the dialogue groups influenced how participants relate to difference and “the other.” More specifically, comments indicate that the dialogue groups helped participants to feel less threatened by people with different worldviews and to be more willing to engage with – rather than try to change – “others.” When asked how the process had changed them, one participant wrote, for example, “Difference exists! And it can be appreciated, not feared” (PHW, November 12, 2005). Another scribbled, “Acceptance of others feelings doesn’t have to threaten me or my faith” (PHW, November 12, 2005). Yet another penned, “We don’t have to be the same to be friends, neighbors, co-workers. Organizations make lines for us. We need to reach across them” (PHW, November 12, 2005).
Similarly, comments suggested a greater willingness to find a way to live with divergent worldviews, rather than to try and resolve them. When participants reflected on “ah ha” moments they had experienced during the project, for example, one participant said that although “it’s a guy’s psyche to fix things,” he had realized that “there is nothing to be solved because you are you and I am me . . . and hopefully I trust you to be my friend” (PDG, #3). Another participant said that the dialogue process had taught her to “live with inherent contradictions, which is something we need to teach our children” (PDG, #13). Yet another participant described a moment where she realized, “Yes, you have those beliefs, and I don’t agree with any, but I still like you and want to be friends” (PDG, #10).

Participants also reported that their experience in the dialogue groups was changing their behavior outside the groups. More specifically, both Mormons and non-Mormons reported “crossing the divide” to engage with the other in ways that they would not have done before. In one group, for example, a non-Mormon described how she recruited women from the local ward to help her stuff information packets for a public health clinic where she worked. Earlier, this same woman had complained that no one on her block waved to her because she wasn’t LDS. “The best part of it,” she said, speaking of her outreach effort, “is that my neighbor now waves at me” (PDG, #11). Another non-Mormon described how the dialogue group had helped to “make things possible I never imagined would be.” More specifically, he described how he had joined the search-and-rescue effort for a lost boy and worked side-by-side with Mormons who “not only served me coffee but also laughed at my off-color jokes” (PDG, #11). Similarly, a Mormon woman described how her experience in the dialogue group had inspired her to volunteer
at the center for New Orlean refugees. “I decided to reach out to people I knew would be very different from me,” she reported (PDG, #13).

**Emotional ambiance**

Mainstream approaches to conflict resolution have traditionally emphasized the rational, treating conflict as a real or perceived incompatibility between disputants’ needs or interests and focusing on strategies that seek to satisfy those interests in some mutually beneficial way. This is true even in the field of ethnic conflict, despite the fact that strong emotions, such as a desire for vengeance or hate, seem to play a major role in motivating many ethnic clashes. In exploring the causes and manifestations of ethnic conflict, for example, Esman (2004) argues that such conflict is rooted in “genuine disputes” over “real” issues and that the resolution of ethnic conflict depends on addressing these “real” issues through rational negotiation of conflicting interests (pp. 88). He writes:

> The roots of conflicts lie in disputes over real issues such as relative power (politics), material resources (economics) or respect (culture). This applies both to large-scale conflicts such as the Sri Lankan civil war and to local riots between French and North African gangs to the slums of Lyons. Until these underlying issues have been addressed and resolved, a conflict cannot be settled, discord will continue, and violence may reappear. (pp. 89-90)

Similarly, in an analysis of ethnic violence in Rwanda, Temple-Raston (2005) argues that source of the conflict between Tutsis and Hutus is material. While acknowledging that hate speech played a role in provoking the massive genocide that occurred in 1994, she maintains that the cycles of violence between the two groups are not driven by emotion, but the competition for scarce material resources. “What outsiders didn’t understand,” she writes, “was that the root of this conflict was not prejudice so
much as the competition for resources. . . . The killings were not fueled by hate. They were fueled by politics and power” (pp. 6-7).

Inherent in these views of conflict and how to work with it is a bias towards rationality, that is, an assumption that disputants are “rational actors” and operate – to utilize Docherty’s (2001) formulation of Weber’s social action categories – from a “goal rational” rationality (p. 168). In other words, it is assumed that disputants are motivated by conscious rational objectives and that they select actions that are perceived as allowing them to reach those rational objectives in the most efficient and effective way. This assumption is reflected, for example, in the popular advice offered by Fisher, Ury and Patton (1981) in their widely cited book on negotiation, Getting to Yes. “Reason and be open to reason,” they write. “Yield to principle, not pressure” (p. 13). Not surprisingly, emotions are often eschewed in such rationality-and-interest-focused approaches to conflict resolution. More specifically, emotions are largely seen as something that needs to be managed so that they do not interfere with identifying and satisfying rational objectives.

In his critique of conventional mediation practice, for example, Mayer (2004) writes that one of the fundamental beliefs of most mediators is that “disputants should always show respect to each other” (p. 133) and that anger, or other strong emotions, have “only a limited and carefully circumscribed place at our table” (p. 134). Fisher et al. (1981) reflect some of that same bias when they counsel negotiators to “Separate people from the problem” (p. 10). These conflict experts describe human beings as “creatures of strong emotions who often have radically different perceptions,” and note that “emotions typically become entangled with the objective merits of the problem” (p. 11). However,
their advice is: “Before working on the substantive problem, the ‘people problem’ should be disentangled from it and dealt with separately” (p. 11). More specifically, they counsel negotiators to “recognize and understand emotions, theirs and yours” (p. 29), “make emotions explicit and acknowledge them as legitimate” (p. 30), “allow the other side to let off steam” (p. 31) and “don’t react to emotional outbursts” (p. 31). In other words, their advice is to manage emotions strategically so that they serve one’s rational objectives.

This paper does not dispute that many conflicts are best understood as a clash between disputants’ political, economic or cultural interests and that interest-focused strategies can be helpful in such conflicts. It does argue, however, that emotion plays a more significant role than is usually acknowledged in many conflicts. It also argues that emotions often need to be unfolded and expressed – not just managed – if conflict is to be resolved, or even reduced.

This is particularly true for conflicts involving identification with emotional trauma that has been (or is perceived to have been) suffered at the hands of another. For these kinds of conflicts, conflict resolution strategies that emphasize rationality and focus on interests are not only inadequate. They may actually serve to perpetuate or exacerbate the conflict, as parties use the process to consciously or unconsciously replay the drama of old woundings (sometimes with the roles reversed) and re-enact the foreclosures on which their identities are partly based. As Hawes (2006) says, “Culturally complex, ethnically diverse, identity based and rights driven conflicts for the most part defy the ‘rational’ logics of Western modes of enlightenment thinking” (Introduction, p. 9). He writes:
Extant work in interest-based conflicts, developed through and as extensions of the Harvard Negotiation Project, has pushed itself to its theoretical and practical limits, and in realizing its objectives has demonstrated it is not capable, theoretically or pragmatically, of productively engaging conflicts of libidinal intensities, desiring-productivities, ethnic identities, human rights, affective intensities and moral values (Chapter 1, p. 4).

Hawes (2006) calls for a new way of thinking about conflict and how to work with it. What is needed, writes Hawes, is a departure “from the transcendent and egoistic economies of conscious rationality and into the libidinal economies of the unconscious and immanent desire” (Introduction, p. 8).

Similarly, Mindell (2002) argues that the traditional emphasis on the conscious and the rational has seriously compromised the effectiveness of most efforts to work with conflict. He writes:

Until now, most conflict work has been based on essentially logical procedures, good ideas, and above all, ordinary states of consciousness, where people are usually expected to be pleasant. That is why such conflict work is rarely successful in dealing with tension. Namely, we are rarely in ordinary states of consciousness when accusations and retaliation occur. [Rather,] fear and anger abound. . . . Conflict work without reference to alternated states of consciousness is like a flu shot for someone in a manic or depressed state of consciousness. (p. xi)

Like Hawes, Mindell also calls for new ways of working with conflict, ways that unfold and engage emotions that are held both consciously and unconsciously. More specifically, he argues that working in a linear, rational way on conflict problems can only be effective after disputants have worked with the “feeling states” that underlie the conflict. “In any group,” writes Mindell, “certain problems must be solved in a structured, linear, rational manner. These solutions will hold up, though, only if disturbances in the feeling atmosphere have been addressed first” (1995, p. 23). Mindell asserts that bringing the emotional and the unconscious into conflict work is what transforms it. In fact, he
insists, bringing disavowed feelings and experiences to consciousness is absolutely critical to working with conflict, especially large social conflicts involving histories of trauma. He writes:

In my earlier books on deep democracy, I claim that future governments can only succeed with awareness of feelings and dreams. When we are asked to become aware of and value our deepest inner experiences, almost any group or world situation becomes immediately different, and manageable. (2002, p. vii)

In a similar vein, Volkan (1997) argues that the cycles of conflict that are perpetuated by the internalized representations of past emotional trauma can only be broken if the emotions associated with that trauma are engaged and unfolded. More specifically, Volkan says that individuals – and large groups – are able to integrate, or move on from, emotional trauma only if they go through a process of “mourning what has been lost” (p. 36). For Volkan, mourning involves not only the admission of loss and the experience of grief, but also the expression of anger or rage over the loss. According to Volkan, mourning usually occurs in two stages. The first stage includes “shock, denial, bargaining” as well as “the sadness and pain of losing access to the deceased” (p. 36). In addition, genuine mourning also involves the expression of anger. “Feeling anger in the first stage is important;” Volkan writes, “it is, in effect, a cry of indignation that says, how dare you leave me!” (p. 36). The second stage involves the emotional acceptance of loss which allows the mourner to assimilate and adapt to a changed reality. This stage, says Volkan, usually involves an “internal examination of hundreds of memories, along with their accompanying feelings” (p. 37).

Similarly, Butler (1997) argues that parties are able to break the “traumatic repetition” of “turning away” from or repeatedly foreclosing the other only if they revisit
the original act of foreclosure and *mourn* the loss of the other or the ideal that was foreclosed. Like Volkan, Butler argues that the act of mourning requires an admission of loss, a shift from denial to acceptance, and an external expression not only of grief (the thwarted love for the lost object) but also of rage (the internalized aggression towards the lost object). Says Butler:

Freud suggests that a “verdict of reality” must be accepted for melancholia to become mourning, and for the attachment to the lost object to be severed. . . . Later, Freud remarks that there can be no severing of this attachment to the object without a direct “declaration” of loss and the desanctification of the object by externalizing aggression against it. (p. 192)

Butler adds:

the break with melancholia involves turning against the already “turned back” aggression that constitutes conscience. Survival, not precisely the opposite of melancholia, but what melancholia puts in suspension – requires redirecting the rage against the lost other, defiling the sanctity of the dead for the purposes of life, raging against the dead in order not to join them. (p. 143)

In other words, a party can break the “traumatic repetition” of the act of foreclosure only if the party comes out of denial, admits the loss of the object it once loved, rages against that loss and mourns its pain. Only then, after the subject has truly let go of what it lost by grieving and raging against that loss can the subject break with the object of foreclosure and end what Butler calls the tortuous dance of ambivalence.

Paradoxically, Butler (1997) argues that while mourning requires an admission of loss and an authentic release of the lost object or ideal, it is this letting go that allows a party to reincorporate, or internalize, what has been lost, although in a new and more integrated form. According to Butler, while the act of mourning unfolds the folded back subject, it does not dissolve or undo it. Rather, the subject is reconstituted by this folding
and unfolding. Furthermore, this unfolding allows the subject to reincorporate what was painfully lost, but in an affirmative and unambiguous way. Butler writes:

> in mourning, the breaking of attachment inaugurates life. But this “break” is never final or full. One does not retract a quantity of libido from one object in order to invest it in another. . . . The conclusion of grief may undo the ego (in the sense of “unbinding” it from its cathexis in conscience), but it does not destroy it. . . . If in “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud thought that one must sever one attachment to break another, in *The Ego and the Id*, he is clear that only upon the condition that the lost other becomes internalized can mourning ever be accomplished and new attachments begun. . . . Indeed, Derrida insists, with the later Freud, that “mourning is the affirmative incorporation of the Other.” (pp. 194-195)

This paper argues that the small group dialogues sponsored by the Bridging the Religious Divide dialogue project helped to foster more agonistic relations between Mormons and non-Mormons because they created space for emotions as well as rationality. More specifically, they provided an opportunity, at least for some participants, to open up past traumas, mourn them and to begin the work of integrating the past and relating to the other in new, less defended ways. In fact, this paper suggests that the small group dialogue process was most transformative for people who were in groups that did the work of mourning.

As this paper noted earlier, two things stand out when one listens to the discourse in the dialogue groups – pain and longing. The pain is the pain of feeling judged, ignored, dismissed, excluded, stereotyped, repudiated or even persecuted. The longing is the longing to belong, to be accepted, respected, even cherished in community for who one is, regardless of one’s religious or other affiliations. In the case of many if not most participants, however, the longing for belonging was deeply buried beneath the pain. More specifically, the emotional trauma of exclusion, ostracization and even persecution
had caused them to “turn away” not only from the other who they believed had inflicted that pain, but also from the ideal or hope of belonging in community.

The transformative move in some groups was to create the space to ask into, unfold, and engage the emotional experience of the original trauma that caused a party to turn away from the other. This move created space for a party to mourn – to admit the loss of their ideal and to express the pain, anger and grief associated with that loss. To the surprise of many, especially the participant or participants who unfolded their psychic wound, doing “the work of mourning” was often transformative. More specifically, it allowed participants to move from antagonism and foreclosure of the other to agonism and a willingness to connect to the other.

The stories of two different groups provide powerful examples. (Individual quotes are not individually cited in the following narratives because all quotes in the first narrative are taken from participants in group #11, and all quotes in the second narrative are from participants in group #4.)

Example One

At their first formal meeting, the participants of this group discussed and made some agreements about how they wanted to speak together and then spent the rest of the evening in a “go-round” sharing “core beliefs.” A few weeks later, at their second meeting, the facilitator invited the participants to share their answers to the question: “How do you experience the religious divide in your own life.” The first person to speak was a non-Mormon lesbian woman who had grown up in an extended family full of Mormons. She described how “I have from the womb a very deep sense of kinship” with the Mormon culture. However, she said, she feels others see and treat her as an outsider.
Another non-Mormon described how he has lived in the same place in Salt Lake City for 6 years, but when his neighbors recently gathered sandbags to protect their homes against a flood, “I was not asked to help. My neighbors all go to the ward, and they don’t see me there, so they know I am something other than.” A young woman who was raised LDS but converted to another religion described Salt Lake City as divided “like the South, except it is religion not color that divides us.” A Mormon said that for him the religious divide goes back to the 1830s when Mormons were “ethnically cleansed.” “I remember my grandparents knew people who fled in fear of their lives,” he said. “That kind of memory can take a century to fade,” he added.

One of the last people to speak was a middle-aged woman who had moved to Salt Lake City eight years earlier. “I am going to tell you a vignette for each of my three children,” she said, “although I could tell you two to twenty more.” The woman spoke quietly, looking down into her lap. “The day we moved into our neighborhood, there were lots of boys on the street, and I was excited that my son would find friends. When he saw a young boy his age outside the house next door, he shouted, ‘Come on over!’ But the kid stopped dead in his tracks and put his hands up in front of his face as if protecting himself. I guess we didn’t pass the test. After all these years, my son has never played with the boy next door. In fact, we have never spoken to those neighbors.”

The woman paused, swallowed, and continued in a voice pinched with restrained emotion. “My daughter was ten and very excited to attend her new school. At the end of the day I went to pick her up. She hopped in the van and slammed the door. ‘What’s the matter?’ I asked. ‘These girls asked me – are you LDS? I didn’t know what to say. So
finally I said, 'I’m presbyterian.' Then my daughter asked me, 'Mom, does it matter?' I said to her, 'For some people it does.'"

At this point, the woman stopped speaking. She was weeping. She gestured with her hand that she could not go on. The atmosphere in the room was thick with feeling but no one tried to interrupt it or create a distraction from the discomfort. Rather, for a long moment, everyone sat in utter silence. The faces around the table looked stricken. Eventually, one more person spoke to complete the go-round. Then the facilitator suggested the participants take the few remaining moments to share anything that was on their minds or in their hearts. Two people spoke up. The first quietly acknowledged the pain that permeated all the stories spoken that evening. The second individual, an LDS man, turned directly to the woman who had told the story about her children. “I guess I’m in shock and denial,” he said. “I’ve known these things intellectually, but I’ve never felt them before.” He paused. “I wish there was something I could say.” He paused again. “I’m sorry.”

When the group met again 3 weeks later, there was an undercurrent of tension in the room. The facilitator suggested the group begin its conversation by “sharing what you heard at the last meeting, and saying something about how you felt about it.” As people spoke, their anxiety seemed to evaporate. Rather than defensiveness, there was a marked openness. Rather than moving away from sharing their stories, people seemed to want to share more. When it was the woman’s turn to speak who had wept about her children, everyone became very quiet. She said, “I went home, and to my surprise, I felt that a huge burden had lifted from me.” She paused, then continued, “I’ve talked about what happened to my kids before, but not with anyone who is LDS. There was something
about being able to say what I did to LDS persons. It was very cleansing.” In fact, she explained, the evening of sharing her painful story had opened up new possibilities for her about how to relate to Mormons. A few days later, she said, she went on a hike with two women, one of which was LDS. When the woman who was not LDS learned that the other was LDS, the non-LDS woman said to the Mormon woman, “Oh, so you are Mormon. I’ve been wanting to ask someone who is LDS about some of their beliefs.” In witnessing this exchange, the women from the dialogue group said she thought, “Oh! So this is how you do it. You simply ask.” For her, this was a profound insight. She called the experience a “God wink.”

This group continued to meet for eight more months. The conversation became more spontaneous and wide-ranging, touching upon beliefs, behaviors, attitudes and personal experiences. These exchanges were not without tension. Often they were full of emotion. But ever since the evening that the woman shared her pain and wept, an atmosphere of empathy and respect permeated the conversation. Towards the end of the group, the facilitator asked the participants to reflect back on the process to date. “Has the process changed you and if so, how?” Most of the participants mentioned the evening when the woman told her story and wept. One said he was “touched by it.” Another called it an “ah ha moment for me.” The women herself described how her experience in the dialogue group had made her decide that it was time to reach out to the neighbors she had long avoided. When a new family moved in on her street, she used their arrival as a reason to invite all her neighbors – including the next door neighbors whose son had backed away from her child so long ago – over to her house for lunch. The next door neighbors were warm and friendly, she said, and lingered after everyone else had left to
talk. Furthermore, she reported, Mormon missionaries had come to her door. Rather than turn them away, as she had years ago after first moving in the neighborhood, she invited them in. She told them “I am happy to listen to you and learn about your beliefs. And then, I want you to listen to mine.” Summing up how her experience in the dialogue group had changed her, she said:

This experience made me think in a different way. It is so easy to point a finger and blame someone else. But the only change you can really affect is in yourself. This process brought me back to that. I am only one person. But I have a responsibility. This process made me think hard about what I can do to reach out. It is easy to sit in a corner. It is hard to reach across.

What happened in the dialogue group that allowed this woman to shift so dramatically from a long-held antagonism toward Mormons to an agonistic engagement with individuals from that community? More specifically, what allowed this woman to turn back towards “the other” that she had “turned away” from, and to re-engage with the ideal of community that she had foreclosed?

This paper argues that the key to her transformation was the opportunity to unfold and engage the emotional experience of her original trauma. More specifically, it was the opportunity to mourn – to open up the psychic wound that she had internalized and become identified with and to express the pain, anger and grief that she had been largely denying, yet acting out, for many years. In the paradox described by Volkan (1997) and Butler (1997), the reopening of the traumatic wound was cathartic. It dissolved her identification with the trauma she had experienced, and thus allowed her to stop re-enacting that trauma unconsciously in her engagement with others. More significantly, it allowed her to reintegrate her lost ideal – the ideal of belonging in community – in a new way, and to turn back toward the other she had foreclosed.
Looking at the woman through the lens of Butler's (1997) writing, one can see how her initial subject position – the victim of hurtful shunning by Mormon others she had hoped would be friends to her children – was formed by an initial “passionate attachment” to the ideal of interreligious friendship and by the foreclosure of that ideal after her children suffered painful rejections. The woman entered the dialogue group caught in the ambivalence that this foreclosure created. Having never fully mourned the loss of her ideal because the pain of that loss was too great to avow, she remained tied to that ideal, but in an ambivalent way. She both yearned for that ideal and foreclosed its possibility. Furthermore, she denied both the yearning and her foreclosure of it, trapping her in the traumatic repetition of the disavowed pain of her experience.

By speaking about the experience of her children, however, the woman brought what she had unconsciously denied into consciousness – her initial passionate attachment to the ideal of neighborliness and interreligious friendship, the depth of her pain in seeing her children rejected, and her foreclosure of neighborly friendships because of that pain. Furthermore, in retelling her story to people in the community she held responsible for her pain, she allowed herself to not only rage against her loss, but also to deeply grieve her pain.

As Butler (1997) describes, it was this act of bringing what was foreclosed – and the pain of that foreclosure – to consciousness, and of mourning what was lost through an external expression of rage and grief, that allowed the woman to let go of the ideal that she had lost and thus, paradoxically, to integrate it into herself in a new way. In this way, she was able to move beyond an identification with trauma and an antagonistic foreclosure of the other, to an identification with a reshaped ideal of community and an
agonistic acceptance of the other. Her new found agonism is illustrated in a reflection she wrote at the end of the dialogue project.

When I was driving in Northern Ireland – on the “wrong” side of the car and the “wrong” side of the road – I had to remind myself each morning as I buckled in, to stay to the left. It became my mantra. It occurs to me that we each need to practice a similar mantra. What is “wrong” to me, may be right to someone else. Our group facilitator borrowed the phrase “mind the gap” from the subway station in England. We must become mindful of our differences in a way that honors rather than judges and accommodates rather than avoids.

Example Two

According to the facilitator of the second group, several of the non-Mormon participants felt “deeply injured” by Mormons and repeatedly expressed “real alienation” and “real pain.” One couple reportedly said they were afraid to have the group meet in their home because they might end up with broken windows. Another couple reportedly said that they were participating in the group because they’d been terribly hurt and felt others needed to know.

When such comments continued to be expressed, the facilitator decided to set aside time for those parties who felt injured to tell their stories. According to one participant, some of those who spoke expressed “raw, searing pain.” To the surprise of some participants, however, the evening was a turning point for the group. A participant who had initially described the evening as “a kind of detour” and “not very productive,” later revised his assessment, noting that there was a “whole mood shift” when the group met again. “The next meeting was really positive,” this participant said. “We were able to discuss how we might make a difference. The group came up with themes and suggestions.”
When the group met for the last time, it was in the home of the couple who feared for their windows. According to one participant, this couple said they had always felt like refugees from neighborhood block parties, but they were now organizing one. Furthermore, he said that the couple’s son, long estranged from the neighbors, had become “best friends” with the man across the street.

As with the first group described above, the transformative move in this group came when the facilitator created space for some participants to unfold and engage the feelings associated with past trauma they felt they had suffered at the hands of others. More specifically, some participants were able to let go of antagonistic attitudes toward others after they had the opportunity to express the pain, anger and grief that lay beneath those attitudes to individuals who represented the community they felt had harmed them. Again, it was the act of mourning that was cathartic. When one participant later invited another to say more about the ways they felt injured, the latter participant reportedly declined, explaining, “I just wanted to know I could say what I did and someone would listen.”

Narrative focus

Story has long been recognized as a tool for making sense of the world and of the “other.” People use story to give meaning to events as well as to explain the motives of others. Story provides context, and out of context comes meaning and understanding. As Docherty (2001) writes, “A story ascribes motives and intent to the actors and describes a world in which these attributed intentions make sense” (p. 61). During times of conflict, says Docherty, stories help people name the conflict, ascribe blame and frame appropriate responses. As or more important, story plays a critical role in “making” our world, our
self and the other. This is because stories provide a conceptual frame for perceiving and understanding "reality" as well as a guide about how to act and interact within that reality. As Pearce and Littlejohn (1997) write, "facts do not by themselves drive human action, because any set of facts can be understood from the perspective of a nearly infinite number of stories. Stories become the driving force of human understanding and action" (p. 109).

The stories that we tell about ourselves and others tell about us, for example, play a critical role in defining our identities. Hall (1996) makes this point when he argues that identities have less to do with "an origin in a historical past" – that is, "who we are" or "where we came from" in a material sense – than they do with "how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves" (p. 4). Identities, he writes, "are constructed within, not outside representation," and arise from "the narrativization of the self" (p. 4). A sense of "belongingness," says Hall, emerges when we "suture" self into story (p. 4).

Similarly, stories play a crucial role in shaping how we perceive and interact with others. Pearce and Littlejohn (1997) stress, for example, that it is through the stories we tell that "the lines between 'us' and 'them' are drawn" and that we "learn how to orient to 'the Other'" (p. 109). They write, "All humans use language to establish a sense of self and other, to define the boundary, and to create some sort of orientation toward others . . . Such stories determine the way we live and the way we orient to others" (p. 109).

The stories that are told over and over again in a community become the "myths" or "grand narratives" that define "reality" for that community (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997, p. 109). These stories not only reflect how a group of people understands who they are
and what their place is in the world. They also serve to shape the world by providing the framework by which people “make sense” of things and determine how to act and interact with others. As Pearce and Pearce (2004) write, “The stories we tell are fateful: they guide and direct the way we feel, think and act” (p. 147). Docherty (2001) gives the example of the story of “the forest is a farm.” This story led people to reshape the forest through practices such as clear-cutting and monocultural planting, says Docherty. It also provided “a conceptual foundation” (p. 61) that gave rise to social institutions such as the Forest Service and schools of forestry. In contrast, for example, is the story of the “planet is a living being,” a story which is giving rise to an increasing number of environmental protection efforts, organizations and institutions. Docherty writes:

> When stories are told and retold by many people,” she writes, “they become the symbolic cores around which organizations, communities, and civilizations shape their collectives lives. . . . Thus, it is useful to think of the central organizing narratives of any community as *worldmaking* stories. (p. 62)

As noted earlier in this paper, there is a close relationship between story and worldview. The worldview held by an individual or group is reflected in the stories they tell. At the same time, the stories told by an individual or group play a significant role in shaping – or “making” – their worldview. When individuals or groups tell stories that don’t “map onto” each other, it is an indication that they hold divergent or incommensurate worldviews.

This brief discussion of the sense-making and world-making nature of story reveals why story is a powerful tool for working with conflict, especially conflict involving identification with divergent worldviews. First of all, story can help people in conflict to make sense of each other’s positions and to better understand each other’s
motives or intentions. This is particularly important in conflicts involving divergent worldviews because parties involved in such conflicts often perceive each other positions as nonsensical, or even crazy, and interpret each other’s positions as deliberately designed to threaten or attack them even. Story can help people make sense of others’ positions and motives because narrative provides a context - or describes a world - in which those positions and motives make sense. To return to the issue of forest management as an example, citizens operating within the story of the “planet as a living being” may find support for a timber cutting proposal nonsensical and may even view such support as a deliberate attack on their ability to live on a healthy planet. However, if someone arguing for the timber cut tells a story - for example, that they have worked at the local mill for 20 years and that the last time a cut was cancelled 100 people lost their jobs - the citizens against the cut may at least be able to see how supporting the cut makes sense within this alternative world-viewing narrative. They may also see that the citizens supporting the cut are not trying to attack a healthy planet, but simply protect their own livelihoods. Obviously, this ability to make sense of an other’s position rarely resolves conflict, but it can change the tone and character of the conflict.

Second, as just suggested, story is a powerful tool for working with conflict because it can help people hold difference and conflict in a less antagonistic way. More specifically, story allows people to sit with the paradox of multiple “truths” without feeling so compelled to try and collapse that paradox. This is because hearing other peoples’ stories help people see that “one’s own stories are partial, local, limited, bounded” (Pearce & Pearce, 2004, p. 55). It is also because, as McNamee (2004) writes, “I may disagree with your position on something, but I can’t tell you that your story is
wrong” (p. 93). In other words, story allows a person to acknowledge and even appreciate the “truth” that exists for another within another’s own story, while not necessarily agreeing with it.

Finally, story can help transform conflict because story can transform the way we understand self, other and the world. As noted earlier, story plays a significant role in shaping our identities, our relationships with others and how we perceive “reality” and act within that “reality.” This suggests that if we change the stories we tell, we will change how we understand, act and interact in the world. It further suggests that if we change the stories we tell about the conflicts in our lives, we will change the nature and status of those conflicts.

In their book, Narrative Mediation, Winslade and Monk (2001) propose an approach to working with conflict based on these simple concepts. In contrast to the traditional view that conflict emerges predominantly from competing needs or incompatible interests, these two authors argue that conflict emerges more from a “clash of entitlements” (p. 96) and a “contest over whose meanings get to be privileged” (p. 141). More specially, they say that conflict arises when people feel others are encroaching on or threatening what they believe they are entitled to. According to Winslade and Monk however, these entitlements are not the result of natural desires, interests and needs. Rather, they are socially constructed from the discourses of gender, race, class, ability, education and so forth that shape our sense of self. In other words, entitlements and the conflicts associated with them emerge – at least in part – from the stories we tell.
Consequently, Winslade and Monk (2001) propose mediating conflict by working with the narratives or stories people tell about conflict, themselves and the other. In contrast to the interest-based forms of mediation popular today, however, they do not sort through people’s stories for the “facts” or even for an understanding of each party’s interests and needs. Rather, they seek to uncover in disputants’ stories the “taken for granted assumptions” about self, the other and the conflict that the disputants have “become subject to as a result of the operation of discourse” (p. 43). By deconstructing the disputants’ “conflict-saturated stories” (p. xiv) in this way, they seek to destabilize or undermine the disputants’ fixed ideas about the conflict, themselves and the other, and to expose the “narrow cultural and social prescriptions that constrain people’s abilities to view the options available to them” (p. 44).

Like the theorists discussed earlier in this paper, Winslade and Monk (2001) see identity as multiply positioned and continually evolving. Like Maalouf (2003), however, they recognize that in situations of conflict, individuals and groups tend to defend a more fixed and narrow sense of identity, and that this defensive allegiance to a single point-of-view exacerbates and perpetuates conflict. Thus, in their narrative approach to working with conflict, they also seek to reconnect disputants with their multiple subjectivities so that they might view the situation from a new perspective, or as they say, “view the plot from a different vantage point” (p. 72). According to Windslade and Monk, mediation can be “an opportunity for participants to reconstruct their interpretation of the history of a dispute in the light of some alternative discursive positions” (p. 46). Thus, they seek to provide “contexts in which the parties have opportunities to reflect upon and examine their positions” by “bringing forth overlapping descriptions of the dispute” (p. 46).
Similarly, they seek to “bring forth aspects” of a person’s character “that previously had been unstoried” (p. 27). This process, they say, allows people to “disengage from their totalizing descriptions” (p. 23) of themselves and the other, and to develop a different story, one in which they are occupy a different discursive position.

According to Winslade and Monk (2001), it is this move that is transformative. In other words, as people tell their own stories and listen to the stories of others – narratives that may offer a different perspective or interpretation of events – their relationship to their own story and the stories of others often begins to shift. In essence, they create a new story, one that allows for “overlapping descriptions” (p. 46) of reality (or a dispute) and even allows one to re-embrace a multiply positioned and evolving sense of identity.

Winslade and Monk write:

> a conversation can develop that begins to unravel a tightly coiled, taken-for-granted reality. As the assumptions that lie behind a particular viewpoint are brought to light, the viewpoint itself comes to look like an option or preference rather than a compulsory or unassailable truth. . . . In this way, a linguistic or discursive shift has created the opportunity for a different subjective experience. (p. 127)

This paper argues that the small group dialogues sponsored by the Bridging the Religious Divide project helped to foster more agonistic relations between Mormons and non-Mormons because the dialogues had a narrative focus. More specifically, the discursive focus on personal story helped participants to make sense of each other’s positions, hold the differences between them in a more respectful way, and change the way they perceived self and other. While this kind of exchange was challenging to some participants at times, many reported that the opportunity to share their personal stories and hear those of others was transformative. As one participant enthusiastically summed it up, “The process of sharing stories and personal experiences is the bridge” (PDG, #13).
As noted earlier in this paper, the mayor’s office offered limited advice to the individuals who were to serve as group facilitators for the Bridging the Religious Divide project. But in stating that the purpose of the project was “to have a conversation” about the religious divide – rather than to analyze, debate or try to solve it – the city did suggest that facilitators encourage participants to “speak from personal experience” rather than to engage in abstract talk about a problem “out there.” Most facilitators put this advice into practice. Many facilitators, for example, tended to initiate discussion by posing questions that evoked personal stories, such as: ‘How have you experienced the divide in your own life?’; “Can you remember a time when you experienced religious prejudice?” “Can you remember a time when you may have exacerbated the divide in some way?” Furthermore, when participants began to speak more abstractly about positions on this or that issue, many facilitators would encourage participants to ground what they were saying in their personal experience by asking questions such as: “How do you experience that personally in your own life?” “Can you share an example of how this have affected you or people you know?”

That story helped participants make sense of each other’s positions is evident in the feedback participants shared at the Harvesting session and in interviews. One LDS participant described, for example, how hearing others’ stories made her realize that non-Mormons often feel the same painful sense of judgment and exclusion that she experiences as a Mormon, even though the situations that give rise to those feelings are different. “When people told personal stories that didn’t happen to me,” she said, “I often found myself thinking I know what that feels like. Maybe the experience is different. But the emotion is the same” (personal interview, November 11, 2005). Numerous
non-Mormon participants described how hearing Mormons' tell the story of how they settled in Salt Lake City to escape persecution helped them to make sense of some Mormons’ attitudes today. “I gained a greater understanding about how the historical experience of Mormons inform their behavior today,” said one participant (PHW, November 12, 2005). Another said, “I understood the LDS faith better and their concern with the quality of community they’ve created” (PHW, November 12, 2005).

Both Mormon and non-Mormon participants reported that hearing others tell their stories helped them to understand the other’s motivations, and often dispelled misconceptions about the others’ intentions. One participant wrote that hearing others’ personal experiences created not only a “greater understanding of each other’s beliefs” but also “a better understanding of how they inform each other’s actions” (PHW, November 12, 2005).

Feedback from participants also suggested that a focus on personal story helped participants to sit with the paradox of multiple “truths,” thus allowing them to hold difference in a less antagonistic way. A Mormon man, for example, described how hearing others talk about their personal experiences allowed him to discover commonalities with people he earlier might have considered dangerously different from him. “The fact that you are pagan or homosexual is interesting,” he told other members of his dialogue group. “But I’ve learned I’m just like those of you who have those life paths. I’m up and down. I have troubles and joys. We really are the same in the bigger picture” (PDG, #4). Another non-Mormon participant talked about how hearing others’ personal stories taught her that what is “‘wrong’ to me, might be right for someone else” (PDG, #12). Speaking her own and hearing others’ stories allowed her to let go of her
initial antagonism toward Mormons, she explained. The lesson she learned from listening to others’ stories was “We must become mindful of our differences in a way that honors rather than judges and accommodates rather than avoids” (PDG, #12).

Perhaps most significant, however, the narrative focus of the dialogue groups allowed participants to deconstruct old, antagonistic stories about self and other and reconstruct new, more agonistic narratives. As these new sense-making stories were created, participants were able to let go of old assumptions and stereotypes, and engage with “the other” with less judgment and more curiosity. A good example is a non-Mormon participant who held some hostility toward Mormons because she had felt harmed in her relationships with Mormons in the past. This woman told a story about how she and her teenage son felt terribly betrayed when one of her son’s best friends, a young Mormon man, wrote a letter from his missionary post proselytizing about his LDS faith. Her son had enjoyed a very close circle of friends during high school, she said, and one of beauties of the group was that it was very diverse in terms of religious affiliation. No one judged the other by their religion, she explained, or sought to convert another to their faith. Rather, everyone respected and loved each other for who they were regardless of their religious affiliation. A few months after her son left for college, however, an incident happened that was causing her and her son to feel great distress. One of her son’s closest friends who had gone off on an LDS mission wrote a letter to her son proselytizing about his LDS faith. The woman interpreted the letter as an effort to convert her son. To her, it was an act of deep disrespect and even betrayal. “I feel like my child was targeted,” she said. “He was singled out. My son’s friend waited until my son went off to college and was far away and vulnerable to write him this letter” (PDG,
When asked if she feared that her son would convert, she said “No, I don’t think so. But my faith is very dear to me. My ancestors date back to Protestants that came over from England in the 1600s. I just feel betrayed. Why pick someone who is happy in their faith and try to change them?” (PDG, #11). Explaining what disturbed her the most about the letter, she answered, “It’s a sense that ‘my religion is better.’ The letter sends the message that ‘you’re not good enough’ as you are” (PDG, #11).

After the woman finished telling her story, the facilitator asked the woman if she would like to hear thoughts from other people in the group. Without denying the woman’s injured feelings, other participants began to gently question some of her assumptions and to offer additional interpretations of situation. “I went on a mission 30 years ago,” said one Mormon. “Like the Marines, missionaries are trained to think single-mindedly – teach, testify, be of service. The letter could simply reflect that reality” (PDG, #11). “You could probably chuck up a lot of it to youth,” commented another participant (PDG, #11). “It sounds like an effort to simply reach out to the dearest person in his life,” suggested another. “He may have written your son instead of the others because he loved him the most” (PDG, #11).

As the woman listened to these and other comments, she looked a bit dazed. She did not agree or disagree with any one comment, but appeared to be trying to consider what she heard. Later in the evening, she said she had decided to share her story about the letter with the group because last time she spoke about her experience of the divide she felt better afterwards. When the group met again a month later, the woman had this to say:

It made me think in a different way. This process made me aware of how I see things, how I interpret what I hear and experience. I remember the
first day when we all sat around the table. I think we all came in with stereotypes. Now that I know everyone, I see each of you as unique. I knew that in my head. That it is not fair to make assumptions about someone until you hear their whole story because until you do, you don’t know them. But now I really get it. (PDG, #11)

This woman’s comments reflect a changed narrative and a changed discursive position within that narrative. In her earlier narrative, she had been betrayed and she was a victim. A Mormon was to blame. In her new narrative, she claims more agency. The issue of blame is irrelevant in this narrative. What’s important is to take responsibility for how one interprets what one hears and experiences.

While she does not say it directly, her comments suggest that this narrative shift is due – at least in part – to her exchange with other participants about the letter her son received. In Winslade and Monk’s (2001) words, that exchange allowed her to “view the plot of the dispute from a different vantage point” (p. 72) and consequently to reconstruct her “interpretation of the history of the dispute in light of some alternative discursive positions” (p. 46). Furthermore, it allowed her to “bring forth aspects” of her character “that previously had been unstoried” (p. 27).

The narrative focus was key. The participants who offered alternative interpretations from different vantage points did not dispute the truth of the woman’s own experience – that she was hurt by the letter. But they did offer alternative “overlapping interpretations” (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 46) of her story, interpretations that helped the woman to “unravel a tightly coiled, taken-for-granted reality” and bring to light “the assumptions that lie behind a particular viewpoint” (p. 27). This allowed her to deconstruct the story she held about the letter sent to her son – and it appears, about
Mormons in general. It also allowed her to reconstruct a new, more agonistic narrative, and a new discursive position, one characterized by less judgment and more curiosity.
“Out beyond ideas of wrong doing and right doing, there is a field.
I will meet you there.”
RUMI

In Denmark, a newspaper publishes a cartoon showing the prophet Muhammad
with a bomb sitting on his head. Subsequently, members of the Islamic faith take to the
streets, condemning the publication that ran the cartoon and decrying western culture for
disrespecting Islam. Demonstrations spread across Europe and some protests become
violent. In France, an increase in the number of Islamic girls wearing head scarves to
school sets off a national debate. Some argue that head scarves are a symbol of women’s
oppression and should be banned in the schools. Others argue that wearing a scarf is an
expression of personal and religious identity that should be protected by the state. The
debate grows increasingly divisive as young girls wearing scarves are sent home from
school. In the United States, the growing movement to legalize same-sex marriage meets
with emotional opposition from opponents who claim sanctioning same-sex marriages
will destroy the meaning of the institution of marriage. Advocates for same-sex marriage
argue they only deserve the same rights as everyone else. Communities and families
become increasingly divided as laws are passed and challenged in the courts.

Like the dispute over the Main Street Plaza in Salt Lake City, Utah, these disputes
are examples of the numerous conflicts around the world that are driven, at least in part,
by issues of identity. More specifically, they involve disputants whose identities are substantially defined by identification with divergent worldviews or moral orders. In addition, they involve disputants whose identities are also often shaped—at least in part—by identification with unmourned trauma, trauma that has compelled them to turn away from or foreclose an other. Beneath the headlines of any of these disputes, for example, one finds groups of people who “appear to be speaking different languages and occupying different realities” (Docherty, 2001, p. 11). One also finds people who feel that they—or their community—historically were injured at the hands of the other in some way and who identify with that injury.

This paper takes up the question of how to work with conflict involving identification with incommensurate worldviews and with historical emotional trauma that has caused parties to “turn away” from an other. It is a critical question because, as illustrated by the examples above, conflict driven by issues of identity can easily become intractable and move toward violence.

The existence of incommensurate worldviews is inevitable. The world is full of people with a diversity of experiences, cultures and beliefs that give rise to a variety of ways of understanding and being in the world. Furthermore, the geographic, political and cultural boundaries that tended to separate people with different moral traditions are becoming more porous. Encountering and engaging with “otherness” is now a daily occurrence—and challenge—for many people and their communities.

Similarly, the experience of psychic trauma due to the actions of another is an unavoidable part of human existence. In some circumstances, psychic trauma is caused by severe calamities, such as war, genocide, persecution or other forms of violent attack.
But as Maalouf (2000) points out, people also experience psychic wounds from much less severe encounters, such as being bullied, humiliated, marginalized or rejected by an other. Thus the question this paper takes up is not how to avoid – or even resolve – conflict involving identification with incommensurate worldviews and unmourned trauma. Rather, it is what discursive strategies can: (1) help foster agonistic rather than antagonistic relations between individuals and groups who identify with divergent worldviews; and (2) encourage disputants to move beyond identification with past trauma and unfold the “foreclosure” of others they feel have harmed them.

In presenting a theoretical framework for exploring the relationship between identity and conflict, this paper asserts three claims. First, identity is best understood as identification with something, such as an ideal, a belief system, a group. Second, while every individual has multiple identifications that comprise their identity (and encourage a sense of connection and empathy with others), a single identification tends to eclipse the others if that identification comes under threat. Third, identity operates across difference and unavoidably involves marking a boundary between “I/we” and “you/they.”

This paper argues that identity is a particularly volatile site for conflict when individuals or groups identify with worldviews – or belief systems — that are incommensurate (that is, they cannot be “mapped onto” each other). It also argues that the potential for identity-related conflict is high when individuals or groups identify, at least in part, with an historical trauma that has been suffered at the hands of another. These ideas suggest the need for approaches to working with identity-related conflict that: (1) do not require disputants to give up or compromise the identifications that comprise their identity, but rather help disputants to hold and live with the differences between
them in a less antagonistic (or, in other words, a more agonistic) way; (2) encourage disputants to *embrace the multiple discursive positions that comprise their identity* so that they can connect and have empathy with a diversity of others, as well as a diversity of perspectives within themselves; (3) allow disputants to *acknowledge, mourn and thus begin to heal the traumas* that gave rise to a foreclosure of another and to the possibility of being in an undefended relationship with the other.

Unfortunately, most traditional approaches to working with conflict do not respond to these issues. Rather, they often emphasize *resolving* difference by *identifying common interests* through *rational* processes. As discussed more in Chapter 5, these approaches tend to backfire where conflict involves identification with divergent worldviews because disputants lack a shared symbolic frame – or grammar – for reasoning together. More troublesome, disputants experience the emphasis on identifying common, or at least compatible interests, as asking them to give up, or compromise, the identifications that define their identity. Similarly, these approaches often fail in conflict involving identification with unmourned trauma because the emphasis on rationality does not provide opportunity to unfold and incorporate the underlying emotional experiences that compel people to take a defensive stance or “turn away” from the other.

The four discursive practices discussed in Chapter 7, however, offer greater potential for working with conflict involving identification with incommensurate worldviews and unmourned trauma because they do address the issues identified above. More specifically, they help to foster agonism between parties with incommensurate worldviews and encourage disputants to turn back toward the other they have foreclosed because they: foster disputants’ ability – and *willingness* – to live with, rather than try to
resolve, difference; encourage disputants to acknowledge and embrace multiple
discursive positions as part of their identity; and create an opportunity for disputants to
mourn – and move on from – past traumas that have caused them to foreclose the other.

Adopting an interactive approach that invites parties to jointly define the social
reality in which they will speak and act together fosters more agonistic relations between
parties because it creates an opportunity for parties to manage their worldview differences
rather than to struggle over whose will be privileged. To use Docherty’s (2001) terms, it
invites parties to cooperatively name the world in which they will interact, rather than to
name that world unilaterally. More specifically, it invites parties to jointly negotiate a
space for interaction that acknowledges and accommodates different worldviews, rather
than privileging one over an other. This opportunity is critical in conflicts involving the
clash of divergent worldviews because a major issue in such conflicts is whose
worldview will be privileged and whose will be marginalized. Cooperatively naming the
world does not mean that participants reconcile, converge or relinquish their worldview
narratives. Rather, it means that parties agree to acknowledge and give respect to
different worldviews even though they may continue to experience those worldviews as
incommensurate, and in some cases, threatening to each other.

Engaging in dialogic discourse helps participants with incommensurate
worldviews to move from antagonistic relations to agonistic relations because it shifts the
focus from resolving differences and reaching common agreement to holding differences
in tension as people seek to explore and understand those differences. In other words, it
creates a space where people with incommensurate worldviews can co-exist – at least
temporarily – despite the fact that their ways of understanding and acting in the world
may seem to nullify the other. The emphasis on “multivocality” — on creating a space
where all voices can be spoken and are listened to, even though they may be experienced
as incommensurate — allows new meaning, as well as new relationships, to emerge. At a
minimum, it facilitates an enhanced understanding of the other. It may also foster an
enhanced willingness, or ability, to acknowledge and express respect of the other. In
addition, it may foster greater awareness of how one’s own attitudes and actions affect the
other. As or more important, however, it produces new ways to relate to and hold
difference and thus, new ways of being in relationship to the other. More specifically, it
fosters the ability to live with paradox, or in other words, to hold divergent and
contradictory perspectives in the same space without denying the validity of any
particular perspective and without trying to collapse the differences between them.
Perhaps most significant, however, it allows participants to enact, rather than simply to
talk about, more agonistic ways of relating to difference and to the other. In other words,
as participants grapple with how to speak and listen to each other across their divergent
worldviews, they create the very reality they were wondering how to create.

*Creating space for the unfolding of emotions* allows parties to acknowledge,
mourn and move on from past psychic traumas that they have suffered at the hands of an
other. This opportunity to acknowledge and mourn past traumas is critical because, as
Volkan (1997) writes, people who have suffered trauma that has not been fully mourned
often internalize that trauma into “mental representations” that serve as a template for
interpreting and experiencing current events. In addition, they often take up an identity
that is based, at least in part, on the foreclosure of the other and of the idea of ever being
in an undefended relationship with the other. As a result, the traumatized parties remain
in a defensive posture toward each other and often re-experience – or re-enact – the
original conflict and trauma in new forms.

*Keeping a narrative focus* fosters agonism between disputants engaged in conflict
involving identification with incommensurate worldviews and unmourned trauma for a
number of reasons. First, hearing others’ personal stories helps people to make sense of
others’ motives and intentions. Second, sharing narratives helps disputants to hold
difference in a less antagonistic way. This is because hearing others’ personal stories
helps people to sit with the paradox of multiple “truths.” (In other words, it allows
people to appreciate the “truth” that exists for another within another’s story, even though
one may not agree with that “truth” within one’s own narrative.) Finally, keeping a
discursive focus on narrative can encourage people to take up new discursive positions
and/or embrace multiple positions as their story evolves in response to other’s stories and
reactions. In other words, the exchange of stories allows people to experience their own
story – and the characters of “self” and “other” – from new vantage points, allowing old
antagonistic stories to be replaced with new, more agonistic narratives.

Conflict involving identification with incommensurate worldviews and
unmourned trauma can be very challenging to address. Such conflict often involves a
substantial history of deep division, and even cycles of violence. There is often a high
level of emotionality, as people may feel they are defending their very ability to exist. In
addition, such conflict can be very complex, involving disputes over resources, economic
opportunities, or political power, as well as issues of identity.

In the face of these challenges, however, this paper offers a note of hope. The
Bridging the Religious Divide dialogue project is testimony to the power of discourse to
transform conflict and heal divides. It is true that the religious divide in Salt Lake City is not as contentious as some identity-driven conflict around the globe. It is also true that the Bridging the Religious Divide dialogue project involved only 120 participants who volunteered to participate in an effort aimed at bridging a divide. On the other hand, it is also true that the dialogue project was transformative, even life-altering, for many participants. Individuals who had not spoken to their neighbors for a decade or more because of their hurt and anger ended up inviting them over for lunch, or joining with them to organize a neighborhood party. People who had felt estranged in Salt Lake City for all their life found a sense of community. People who feared the divide would erupt into violence left with a sense of hope.

The significance of such changes, even when small in number, should not be underestimated. This paper takes a small step toward identifying the discursive practices that can help bring about such transformations. More study, and more practice, is needed.
APPENDIX

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY OF DATA COLLECTION

ACTIVITIES

Participant observation of public meetings and hearings focusing on how Salt Lake City should respond to the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals October 9, 2002, decision regarding the Main Street Plaza.

- December 10, 2002: Salt Lake City Council meeting. (I watched this meeting “live” on television and recorded it.)
- December 17, 2002: Salt Lake City Council meeting. (I watched this meeting “live” on television and recorded it.)
- February and March, 2003: Salt Lake City Mayor’s office meetings with community groups. I observed meetings with the Capitol Hill, Avenues and Glendale neighborhood councils.
- April 9, 2003: Salt Lake City Planning Commission public hearing and meeting. I attended this hearing.
- June 3, 2003: Salt Lake City Council public hearing and meeting. I attended this hearing.
- June 10, 2003: Salt Lake City Council public hearing and meeting. I attended this hearing.

Participant observation of the Advisory Committee organized by the Salt Lake City Mayor’s office to advise the Mayor about creation of a Bridging the Religious Divide initiative.

- Spring 2004 - Winter 2005: I participated as an advisory member in meetings held over this period.

Participant observation of Bridging the Religious Divide public forums.

- Fall 2004: Public forum at the Main Library. (I missed this one because I was out of the country.)
- Winter 2004: Public forum at the University of Utah. I attended this forum.
- Winter 2004: Public forum at the Sorenson Center. I attended this forum.
Participant observation of Bridging the Religious Divide small dialogue groups.
- I facilitated a group that met nine times between May 2005 and April 2006.
- I observed eight groups, one to four times each, for a total of 18 meetings observed, between May and September, 2005.

Participant observation of Harvesting meeting designed to “harvest” participants’ insights and perspectives on the Bridging the Religious Divide dialogue process.
- November 12, 2005. I helped to design and facilitate this meeting.

Interviews
- I interviewed 9 of the individuals who served as facilitators for the Bridging the Religious Divide dialogue project.
- I also interviewed 7 participants in the project.
- Most of these interviews took place in October and November, 2005. A few took place in June 2006.
- I also completed several informal “reconnaissance” interviews before the Bridging the Religious Divide project was initiated in 2003.

Artifact review
- Artifact review took place between December 2002 and Spring 2006.
- It included review of: written notes recorded at the meeting held at the end of the Bridging the Religious Divide small group dialogue project to “harvest” themes and insights; news stories and letters-to-the-editor published primarily in local Salt Lake City newspapers; video tapes of several public hearings held regarding the Main Street Plaza dispute; the transcript a City Council meeting; documents related to the lawsuit filed by ACLU challenging restrictions of speech on the Main Street Plaza; and documents published by the LDS Church.
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