

Master's Series on Field Research

A series of interviews with major figures in field research conducted in the early 1980s
by Peter Blanck

Transcript of an interview with Herb Kelman



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Herb Kelman: Well, of course you know what, the question of what field research is, is a somewhat am--you know it's a somewhat ambiguous issue, that you know, I don't think there is a sharp line between field research and I suppose lab research would be the alternative. But basically I would say that the most important distinguishing characteristic of field research is that you are working in the natural habitat, as it were, of the people whom you are studying. As distinguished from lab research in which you are essentially bringing people into your own habitat. And I think this is a, this is the fundamental difference. So the most, the type of field research that is most clearly, can be most clearly defined as field research in terms of its basic characteristics is naturalistic observation. And I would say if one then in a naturalistic situation also interviews people, but you know talks to them within the natural situation, that would of course also be part of field research, as you move away from that, as for example you move in the direction of opinion polling, survey, you know traditional survey research, I think that's often also in our field called field research. And I think it is field research, but in a more marginal way. It's field research in the sense that you are coming to people in their homes let us say, or in their, in their environments rather than having them come to you in your own environment. So in that sense it's field research. But on the other hand you are coming to them with a standard set of questions that you have designed that doesn't grow out of the natural situation. So in that sense it deviates from what I would regard as the, as the major characteristic of field research.

Also, of course one often manipulates the situation in the field and, now that I think does not necessarily reduce, again I think that is a deviation from the notion of studying people in their natural habitat. But sometimes these manipulations are just manipulations of the natural habitat. So, for instance if you have an organizational experiment in which you are trying, in which you are interesting in comparing different different ways of organizing an office, or different climates in a classroom let us say. Now these represent manipulations but they are variance of the natural situation. Usually it is management that decides how to organize a, an office. Or it's the school administration that decides what kind of a, you know how to run a classroom. And so if they decide to do it in different ways for, even though it's done for experimental purposes I still would see that as variances of the natural situation and so I would still see that as field research. Similarly take the sort of traditional field experiment in social psychology, let's say an experiment in helping behavior, again the experimenter manipulates the environment, the experimenter creates an incident let us say, but to the extent or or you know the experime--well let's say you have an experiment in which people are collecting funds on the street. Well again it's a variation of the kinds of things people are naturally exposed to in their habitat so in that sense I would say that's still a type of field research. To make the thing more confusing though I would say that certain laboratory experiments can also be seen as field field research.

And my best example here is the Milgram Obedience Studies because basically what Milgram was doing was to study laboratory behavior. I mean his, the subject matter was essentially how people behave in a scientific laboratory. So in that sense the laboratory was the field. So anyway as I was saying the, there are, the line between field research and laboratory research is not necessarily a fine one, but the main characteristic is the

extent to which one is trying to capture the natural elements of the situation, and this then also I think is a major problem for a, from a methodological point of view. It's a problem of how, in some respects the laboratory situation makes it easier for the experimenter because the experimenter has a great deal of power in terms of controlling the situation. Not absolute power obviously, for a variety of reasons. Because while there are ethical constraints and there are practical constraints and there are the constraints coming from people's willingness to put up with things. So there's obviously constraints, and there are credibility constraints and all of that. But the constraints in field research I think are greater because in a sense the experimenter has to adapt himself or herself to the requirements of the natural situation. And that, you know, there are skills both on trying to capture the critical elements of the situation, you have to understand what the elements of the situation are. There are interpersonal human relations type skills that are involved in terms of gaining the cooperation of the individuals.

There are political issues involved. Usually you are not, or very often you are not dealing with isolated individuals but you're dealing with individuals who are within some kind of organizational setting, or community setting and you have to be concerned about getting, let us say approval up the hierarchy or of avoiding suspicion, let us say if you are doing a community study, or a, or a say an ethnographic study, you have to attend to the fact that people are often suspicious of outsiders coming in to do research. So you have all of these kinds of human relations problems that you have to deal with. Now from an ethical point of view I think the, the major problems in field research stem from the fact that you are very often operating in a real life situation and therefore what happens in that situation is more likely to have real life consequences for the people. In that sense, laboratory research often is, is less, you know, is less risky because it is an isolated situation. Whereas in many kinds of field research you are dealing in the real life situation and you know some of these problems maybe we'll come to when I talk more specifically about the kinds of things that I'm doing.

Peter Blanck: The, a, you talk basically about interpersonal skills, political skills and ethical. I want to push you a little further on the ethical unless you feel you'll talk about them in the relation to your own study. There is a school over at the business school, some of them would say don't tell anybody what you are doing when you go in, just tell them after. And you know you obviously go in in good faith and you're responsible researcher. And then there is another school that says you have to inform people before you go in. How do you feel on that issue?

Herb Kelman: Well on the whole I would come out very strongly on the second side. You know in other words to me a fundamental principle, ethical principle in the conduct of research, is the principle of informed consent. Now I'm, I am somewhat flexible on this, you know I don't think that, that one can make absolute statements and there are certain kinds of exceptions that I would recognize. For instance, to take an extreme an extreme case, if you're doing naturalistic observations, let us say you're at a football game and you are interested in observing the reactions of the audience to what is happening. And so you are sitting and you're watching people and you're taking notes on who is jumping up and who is cheering and so on and so forth. Well now my feeling

is that in that kind of situation it is not necessary to obtain the consent of the people who you are observing because of the fact that you are operating in a situation that is totally public, you are not identifying the people you know you don't know who the individuals are, there is no danger that any particular individual would be embarrassed by what you publish. You know, or that information about any particular known identified individual would come out. And they're in a situation in which they have to assume that their behavior is observable. I mean they're in a public situation.

Now they don't usually assume that it's going to be observed by a social scientist, who is you know noting down the frequency of their responses and all of that and so, so technically one could say that even here informed consent would be desirable because you are, you know because in a sense you are doing something that is somewhat out of the ordinary. Nevertheless I'm sufficiently flexible here to say in this situation, a situation as public as this situation, and which an individual is not identified, and with all of these special characteristics, and in which gaining informed consent would in effect make the study impossible. Because what you are trying to do is to observe the ongoing behavior in the situation. Now, and, now let me just add I would feel differently if you were using certain equipment. Let us say if you were recording, if you were, if you were using a secret hidden microphones or anything of that sort. That 's a different situation, people have a right to expect that they are not going to be, even in a public situation, they have a right to expect that they are not going to be secretly recorded. But they do not have a right to expect that their behavior won't be watched when they are in a public situation. And so I would say the social scientist is in the same position as a journalist or a writer or anybody else who is standing there and observing.

So I am giving this as an example to say that I'm, you know my position on informed consent is not absolute, but basically I feel that people, if something is done to people that has potential consequences for them, they should be given the opportunity to decide whether or not they want to take the chances that this entails. And I can't see any other way of doing that then by giving them the opportunity to, you know giving them enough of a basis for knowing what is being, first of all that something is being done to them, and what it is, and what the possible consequences are so that they can make an informed judgment about their own interests.

Peter Blanck: Now how do you differentiate between individual informed consent and group informed consent? For instance, you do a survey and you don't identify individuals but you identify groups. Blacks in the south are doing something. Isn't that sort of an invasion? I realize that it's a much grosser level, but with the same logic it's.

Herb Kelman: Well I think that I, I agree with you. I mean certainly this would be true, let's take a somewhat simpler case then we're, we're talking about a definable and a readily identifiable group. I mean let's say a work group in a, you know in an industrial organization. And let us say that you are doing a study in which you are comparing, you're not you know, you are giving each individual confidentiality, but you are comparing different groups, different units, and let's say you are saying that unit A the morale is high, or unit A has such and such attitudes about management, and unit B has

others and so on. Now here's a situation in which it is conceivably possible that a given unit might be penalized for having the wrong opinions, or for revealing certain of their practices. And so even though you are protecting individual confidentiality, the, often the policy, and let's say in this case as expressed by management actions, deals with the work unit. And so therefore identifying the unit is really a matter of consequence. And so under these circumstances I feel it would not be enough to single out each individual and get their consent, but in a sense you also have to somehow deal with their organizational representative. Now you take that beyond that, situation of where you'll dealing with a whole segment of the population.

Now there it becomes much more difficult. I mean who, first of all let me say I agree with the implication of your question, namely it is a problem. Because, it's a problem particularly for minority groups let us say, you know any group that is in a vulnerable position. So you take a segment of society, the things that come out about them in a survey, or in a, let's say I mean the more obvious case would be a, say intelligence test. I mean this, we have historical experience about possible effects that that has. So the data that you provide about the group have an effect, or have a potential effect on the reputation of that group in the larger society and therefore on the policy, on policies that might be directed at them and have an important impact on their fate. Now the problem is that, who makes the decision? You know who do you, who decides what are risks that this large population group ought to be taking and what risks they ought not to be taking? What is in the groups' interest and what is not in the groups' interest? The problem of course is that it is often a matter of debate. I mean one can argue that a, let us say, in the long run blacks will benefit from certain kinds of research, whereas some elements of leadership, of the groups leadership might argue that they suffer. So, so this becomes a matter of considerable controversy.

And so I don't think that you can, I don't think that there are easy ways of handling the matter of informed consent in this kind of situation, but I would think that it would be very important because of that, it would be very important to at least have a consultative process. To have a process in which representatives of that community or people who are sensitive of the needs of that community are brought into the, you know into the decision making about it. So I think it can't, it probably can't, this kind of decision probably cannot be handled in the, you know in the way in which we often handle individual informed consent. You know, through the kinds of regulations that we now have for research with human beings or through the institutional review, institutional review procedures and so on. I think it has to be handled more at the policy level.

Peter Blanck: In, I wanted to ask you now in the way you typically do field research, how do you and how have you approached this problem of informed consent? What's the order in which you typically do things? I realize it differs from study to study, but generally what is, how do you go about setting up a field research study? What is the first contact you make? What is the first major decision you face in your mind?

Herb Kelman: Well the things that I have done that you might call field research vary so widely that I can't give you a kind of general answer to that, but I can give you some examples.

Peter Blanck: Right, or if you want to talk about participant observation now and move into specifically your area of interest now that's fine, and then drawing that as an example of an ongoing.

Herb Kelman: Ok, let me tell you, so so let me just put aside the question of informed consent and the ethical issues and let's come back to those because they are, I think they are very important.

Peter Blanck: Just understanding, as if you were addressing someone who is completely not familiar with your work, so whatever background is needed.

Herb Kelman: You mean there are people who are not familiar with my work?

Peter Blanck: I think a few in the country, but I don't know around this area.

Herb Kelman: Well alright, I will try to assume that there may be such people left. Well what I've been doing for the last few years is what I would really describe as a type of action research and you know I'll come back to that because it has more in common with clinical research I feel than with more traditional field research. Basically I've been working on international conflict, especially on the Arab/Israeli conflict. I have an action research program in which I try to create opportunities for Arabs and Israelis, usually influential, politically influential individuals. It might, typically the people I work with are people who are politically influential but not decision makers. And I try to create opportunities for these individuals to meet for direct discussions in which some of my colleagues and I act as a special kind of third party. So we play a, primarily a facilitative role. We create the context that allows these individuals to communicate with each other, and we create a special set of norms and ground rules for this communication, and then we intervene in the communication in a variety of ways to keep the process going, to introduce new ideas, to make observations and so on and so forth. Basically our purpose is to create a situation in which parties involved in an intense conflict can relate to each other in an analytic, you know relate to the conflict in an analytic problem solving way.

The, you know the kind of, we use the term problem solving workshops for at least the ideal opportunity for this kind of communication because we try to create an atmosphere and set of norms and a set of procedures that will allow the participants to look at the conflict analytically and to come to view it as a joint problem that requires their joint effort at problem solving. And at the very least you know I mean it's, our assumption is that this kind of situation can make it more likely that new ideas for conflict resolution will emerge. At the very least we hope and have reason to believe that it is a situation in which the participants can learn something new. They can learn something about themselves, I mean about their own side in the conflict, their own party, I'm not talking about themselves as individuals. We're not focusing on individuals here, we're focusing

on, on the conflict between the communities, so they can learn something about, about their own side in the conflict. They can learn something about the other side in the conflict, about the dynamics of the conflict, and about the possible ways in which conflict resolution may occur.

Peter Blanck: How do you get access to these people? And how do you choose a little more practical concerns, like where you hold the conference, who actually you do choose? I realize there -

Herb Kelman: Yeah, well this is a, this is a large part of the work. You know I mean identifying the people, getting access to them and so on. And this is something that involves work over a long period of time. And one has to build credibility, one has to build contacts and so on. And therefore for the last seven years, or six or seven years I have been traveling regularly to the Middle East, and I have been building contacts there. I see people there on a regular basis, and I meet new people. I also am associated, here at Harvard, with the Center for International Affairs. And I run the Middle East Seminar at the Center for International Affairs. And as a result of my activities at the Center I have regular contacts with people from the Middle East in connection with my seminar, people who come as short term visitors or as long term visitors, as fellows or as visiting scholars to the Center or to other units of Harvard University and so on. So I have gradually over the years I've become very much involved in all of the circles of all of the people from the Middle East at least who come to the United States, both officials and scholars and so on.

And you know getting to know people, identifying people, being in a position where you can ask them to participate in your activities and so on. These are all things that require a long term effort, you know that's built up over a number of years in which people get to know you and in which you're, of course you have to start with a certain level of credibility, but your credibility is always on the line essentially, and you always have to demonstrate it and this is something that happens over a long period of time. Now aside from the ac--problems of access and credibility and so on, there are also problems of knowledge and information. And this is one of the important things that I have found in this work, that I need to know a great deal about the particular conflicts that I am working on. Now at least this is my method, you know this is I, I go about it. I don't want to say that it's the only way to do it, and there are other ways of doing it, but in general my position has become that at least for myself while my major asset, you know the major contribution that I feel I can make, is the contribution of a generalist, namely I am a social psychologist who has studied inter-group conflict and attitude change and group process and so on. And so therefore I have professional knowledge about conflict in general, about conflict resolution, about ways of producing individual and social change and so on. And its, these, these are my major contributions and out of these I have developed certain ideas about technique you know about intervention technique, out of these as well as you know borrowing from other forms of social and personal intervention.

So, so my major contribution is that of a generalist, I'm not, you know I don't come to this as a Middle East specialist. On the other hand I feel that in order to be credible and in order to really know what is significant, who, you know just the kind of questions you raised. Who are the people that you select? How do you, you know in order to have, to have, to gain some insight into the dynamics of conflict, into the barriers of conflict resolution. For all of these things I feel I need to know a fair amount about the history, and a great deal about current events, you know what is taking place, and something about the structure of each side, about the political structure and so on. And therefore I have to keep in touch constantly with what is going on, and this of course is another reason for my regular trips to the Middle East. Now in my case this has meant that I, it would be very difficult for me to work on several different conflicts at the same time. Simply because it requires so much of my time and energy to stay in touch with what is happening in this particular conflict, I have in fact done some work on the Cyprus conflict, but that's a not--you know one in which I have an interest over a number of years. Actually off and on for maybe fifteen years or more. So I'm not a total stranger to that, and I try to follow that too. But still I see my relation to that conflict as being quite different from my relationship to the Arab/Israeli conflict because I really am not, I don't pretend to be as much in touch with what is going on there on a day to day, week to week basis as I do in the Arab/Israeli conflict.

Peter Blanck: Now how do you measure your effectiveness, and realize there is no data points, but what's a measure of success or a measure of improvement at least?

Herb Kelman: Yeah, well I have, I have to say at the outset that I don't have any formal measures of success. And I have not in fact engaged in any formal research procedures here, and maybe we can come to that in a minute if you'd like as to why I haven't engaged in formal research procedures. There are certain things, I mean largely it's because it hasn't been possible for a variety of reasons, but on the other hand there are also certain things that would have been possible that I haven't done simply because of time. So let me tell you what I see as, you know, the way I can put it as why I feel that it's worth my while to continue the effort. Although it may not be sufficient, it is not sufficient to demonstrate effectiveness of my approach, in a formal kind of a way. But, well one is in the form of testimonials, which is always for people who have worked on, on any kind of change procedures, that's always a risky business because you know testimonials are selective responses. You get testimonials from the people who feel that it has been positive. You may not hear anything from the people who feel that the experience has been negative. Also you know these are qualitative, you know really self reports, so testimonials are not evidence but, but they are a kind of evidence and I've had testimonials of two kinds. I mean I've had testimonials from people who have participated in, in my, you know in workshops, and who have come and said that they have, and you have to remember that all the people that have worked, participated in workshops with us are people who are quite sophisticated to begin with.

You know these are not novices. These are people who have been centrally involved, but who nevertheless come afterwards and say that they have learned things that they have not ever learned before. They've had opportunities to interact with people on the other

side that they have never had before and so you have that kind of testimonial. But you also have testimonials, I've also had some testimonials from political figures who have told me that some of the activities that my colleagues and I have organized have made a direct contribution, for example to the Egyptian/Israeli peace process. So you have testimonials of this kind. This is, you know this is one. A second kind of evidence is observation of what the people who have participated in some of our activities, what they do. You know most of these people are people who write and talk publicly about the conflict and you can look at what they say or what they write. Now this is one thing that I could have done more systematically, you know one, I could have looked more systematically at some of these people's writings and pronouncements. I have not done that, but I do follow them. And there are a number of instances in which people, some of who play important roles in the conflict, say some very different things, and do different things after as compared to before.

Now I do not claim that as experimental evidence, that they've changed as a result of participating in our workshops or whatever our other activities are, simply because these people, you know the people who participated in our workshops are already people who are disposed, predisposed to this kind of effort. Otherwise they wouldn't come, and so in that sense. And I know they're people that do a variety of other things, so it would be very very difficult, in fact it would be impossible for me to say that they have changed specifically as a result of a particular workshop in which they have participated. You know in other words to pinpoint what it is that produces the change is impossible, and I might add for this reason, reason also, the standard kind of evaluation method is not really appropriate for this situation. You know the standard approach of evaluation where you say "Ok I am introducing a particular program, a particular intervention, and I want to see what effect that intervention has." Now I think that's impossible in our situation because we're dealing with a situation and with people who are involved in a whole variety of activities, and the main purpose of our workshops is not to produce a discriminable, you know identifiable piece of change, but to contribute to a larger process. In fact I deliberately select people and time the workshops and set the agenda for these in such a way in which they would contribute to a larger process. And so given that situation, it's very difficult to then isolate that experience and say, you know it has produced a particular change, I think that is virtually impossible and therefore I don't claim, I don't claim that even though I can point to the changes in individuals, I don't claim that our experience, the experience that we've provided has uniquely produced these changes.

All I can say is that I believe that we have contributed to a larger process in which these people and their communities are already involved. Now another kind of evidence is, is the fact that again you know you can raise the same kinds of questions about that evidence but I would mention it, is that the people that have worked with us continue to be interested in working on direct communication and continue to be interested in working with us. You know in other words, in many cases the, these are not just one shot affairs, but I've established long term relationships to some of these people, and they continue to be interested in that process. Now again, I can't say that that is strictly a result of their work with us, because they were obviously predisposed and they are also

participating in other kinds of activities. What I can say is that at least they have not been discouraged by their participation with us. Another kind of evidence of a ver--of a different nature is that, and this is where in a sense the research part of this effort comes into the picture. For me these workshops and other meetings, and my travels and so on are an opportunity to learn something about the conflict, about the dynamics of the conflict, and about the possibilities for conflict resolution. In this way, this is what I mean by saying that it's a form of research. But it is a form of research that is directly tied to an action purpose. Now I then try to distill what I've learned in papers I write, and in lectures I give and so on. And I often, you know typically get reactions of parties of the conflict to my own formulations, and in so far as as they confirm, they validate what I, you know the conclusions that I've drawn from the meetings, that also represents a, you know some sign that at least I have learned something, what I have learned as a result of these, of my observations of these interactions seems to be to the point. And so that's another, another kind of confirmation that something, something significant is going on. Well these are some of the ways in which, in which I conclude that, that there is a certain degree of effectiveness.

Plus of course the process itself, you know I mean observing the process, and what is happening and you know one's impression that something is happening, is happening to, to the people. It's easier, I might add, to assess that part of it, you know to assess that the individuals who are participating are in fact learning something and are in fact changing their perceptions and their attitudes in some significant ways. That I think is easier to observe, you know to evaluate than the effect that this has on the larger policy process, for obvious reasons. Because you know the, because you are only making a very small contribution to the larger po--I mean I, I at best claim to be making only a very small contribution to the policy process. And you know to be certain that you have in fact made such a contribution would, you know it's the kind of evidence that is very hard to come by, although, you know this is why some of the testimonials coming from political decision makers are at least encouraging in that regard.

Peter Blanck: Now you've described your role as a participant observer. With that role obviously comes the task of trying to remain objective and deciding when to intervene and how to intervene. If you could talk briefly, what is meant by the term, participant observation generally? And then how it's relevant to your role in this action research?

Herb Kelman: Well of course the role of participant observer is, you know is a very broad one. The most typical case of participant observation would be, let us say someone who lives in a community, either because he or she is already a member of that community, or who joins that, comes to that community specifically in order to do research, and who just lives within that community, and participates in the regular activities of that community. Or one can say the same thing about an organization, you know as a member of an organization or joins an organization and in the process, while being a regular member of that community or that organization the individual has opportunities to observe what is happening and to talk to people and so on. And essentially it's, you know immersing, the investigator immerses himself or herself into the, into the ongoing activities of the community or the organization. So I mean that's

your more, your more typically type of participant observer. Now I'm a participant observer in this research more in the way in which let us say a therapist, a psycho therapist is, would be a participant observer in the therapeutic relationship. This is, you know I said earlier that I see some, you know that my research in many ways is, is very much like clinical research and this is what I want to elaborate on now.

Although let me just say again that when I take this model I do not want to imply that what I am doing is psycho therapy, I'm a, I'm not operating at the level, it's very important for me to make that point because as a psychologist working in international relations I typically have the problem that people associate there ideas of what a psychologist does, and they, people often assume that psychologists working in international relations is interested in psychopathology or is interested in the you know, in the pathology of leaders, and is interested in trying to deal with this and this is very very far from a, from my kind of operation. I mean I'm interested in collective phenomena and I'm interested in, you know, in really the psychological dimension of political processes, decision making processes, and collective and collective processes so. And I do not assume that one can just carry over individual psychology, and certainly individual psychopathology to this level. So when I, when I use this model of the psychotherapist I'm only here talking about the nature of the research in a sense. The psychotherapist is a participant observer in a sense, in an ongoing process. In which the psychotherapist, however, has a particular role. Now in the same way, I am, in my role as a third party, as a sort of mediator or I prefer to say facilitator of interaction between the conflicting parties I have an opportunity to observe that interaction. And this is, you know, this is a very unique opportunity. An opportunity to see parties in conflict interact with each other in an intense analytic way. And I have in a sense a first row seat at this kind of interaction.

And of course I'm there not just as an observer, I'm there as a significant participant because I provide the context for it and I as you said, I intervene you know, I provide the context, I define the norms and the ground rules, I play a role in enforcing those rules and I intervene in a variety of different ways. Now how you intervene, this of course varies with the occasion, it varies with the style, and so on. My own case, my interventions, I tend to be fairly non-directive in my, in my general approach. I, my major interventions really are in setting the stage. And defining the rules, and laying out a certain kind of agenda. And I would say, I would say the most important things that I do happen before the workshop actually convenes. It is, it is in, you know in, because I talk individually to each of the people that are going to be involved. I tell them what will be involved. I tell them about the ground rules and so on and so forth. Answer their questions, discuss the agenda with them, and all of that and I play an important role in the sense there as a, as a repository of trust for the different sides. You know I don't, I do not assume that you can create, in this kind of workshop, a situation in which parties that are involved in a very very intense, long term conflict can begin to trust each other. But what I think can be done is that they can come to trust the situation. So that they can come to feel that in this situation they can be free to interact with each other, and to entertain new ideas, and all of that. And a lot of that is by virtue of the third party, in the sense, by virtue of each of the other, of the first, you know by the first and second party's trust in us, they are able to

have enough trust in the situation so that they can interact with the other so they could really establish a working trust with the adversary. Now in the sessions themselves a lot of what I do is summarizing and occasionally we will intervene, and we use three kinds of interventions. The most interesting kind of intervention would be a process intervention.

Where we might look at something that is happening here and now in the interaction between the participants that seems to be odd or you know that they don't seem to understand. And we can then come in and say, well perhaps we can understand this in terms of some element of the dynamics of the conflict, so we use the ongoing, ongoing process. The way in which a therapist or an encounter group leader, you know a t-group leader, analytic group leader, might use the ongoing process in the situation here to learn something about the dynamics of the conflict. The difference of course is that we are not focusing on what this tells us about the individuals involved, or indeed about their interpersonal relations. We are only focusing on what this may tell us about the relationships between their communities. You know about the in—about the inter-group, we're only working at the inter-group level. But what is happening in the interaction between these individuals here and now very often reflects some of the dynamics of the inter-group conflict. So on occasion we will come in and point that out and essentially raise that as a question. "Do you think this is what might be going on?" In the hope that we are touching on something significant which will then lead to further insight. Another kind of intervention would be a content observation in which we will pick up some things that are being said essentially as a basis for making a generalization. You know let's say pointing out some of the convergences or divergences in the views of the side, the two sides. Or something about the kinds of concerns that seem to be cropping up regularly.

And I'm particularly interested as part of my process, I'm particularly interested in parallelisms. This is something that parties usually resist because you know, because when you are involved in a conflict you generally assume that the biggest difference is between our goodness and their badness and to, now of course when I point to parallelisms they are not meant as moral parallelism, I'm not talking about moral symmetry, or even complete empirical symmetry, but I'm usually picking up what I see as functional equivalences in the sides, in the difference, in both sides, which I think are part of the you know part of what is involved in conflict. It's, you know, why conflict escalates and perpetuates itself has to do with the fact that the sides are in fact feeding each, each other, that there are these reciprocal processes going on.

Peter Blanck: What about misinterpretations? Even as simple language barriers, how do you, there are obvious cultural difference, do you direct and try to help each side understand the different cultural perspectives?

Herb Kelman: We will on occasion do that. Although - on occasion we will do that, usually we are dealing with people who are quite sophisticated, and the language I might say is in all the things that I've done has been English so both parties are at something of a disadvantage, although we generally dealt, most of the people we've dealt with are people who are very very fluent in English so we are very fortunate in that respect you

know. A third party whose own language is English I think has great advantages over a third party whose language is something else. But we will, we will occasionally do that, but I must say it has not happened, it has not happened very often. It may be partly because we are dealing with sophisticated people, it may be partly because of my own bias. My own bias is that although I definitely agree that there are cultural differences, and that these cultural differences sometimes create barriers to communication, but my feeling is that these are sometimes overdone, overemphasized. That sometimes the barriers are more situational, are more, arise more out of the dynamics of the conflict rather than out of the particular cultural dispositions of the parties. And so I may be somewhat less inclined to do that.

But in principle I agree that this this may be true and certainly, certainly one of the things that in principle I would do would be to, let us say point to the the, let's say some of the concerns that are rooted in the particular historical experience of one of the sides, now broadly speaking those are cultural differences. Now that's the kind of thing, you know in other words trying to point out that what the other is saying or doing can be understood, you know it's not necessarily bad faith or totally bad faith as you think, but it can be understood as coming out of certain historical traumas let us say and certain historical experiences that this party is working through. I mean this would be one kind of thing, one kind of intervention that would be highly relevant. Another, another thing would, you know might be, sometimes you might want to point out that, well let's say in the whole process of reconciliation that there are certain steps that have certain meanings within certain cultures, and these may sometimes not be understood by the other party so there's definitely a place for this kind of intervention.

With regard to taping, this is something I've discussed and thought about, discussed with my colleagues back and forth, and we have established a policy so far on our workshops that we do not tape anything and it's very very tempting. And just recently I was exploring the possibility with respect to one workshop I started to kind of try and open this up and even talk about videotaping and the reaction that I got to that led me to back off again. Basically the reason we don't tape is because we don't want to interfere with the process. You know we feel that anything that, and I have confirmed that, you know that that even if people were to say, "Well go ahead, I always say what I want to say anyway," but that the fact that what they're saying is going to be part of a permanent record is an inhibiting, is an inhibiting element. And in my kind of situation, now you know sometimes that, I mean in many situations I would say, "Ok it's the price worth paying." You know, you collect important kinds of data and if it inhibits a little bit, well ok and usually people forget, after they get into the process they forget about the fact that they are being taped and all of that. But in this situation it is so critical, you see a critical element of the whole procedure is to allow people to interact in a private situation in which they can forget for the moment at least about their constituencies you know. We don't want them to forget completely about the constituencies but we don't want them to talk only to their constituencies, we want them to talk to each other. And that's the problem in a conflict situation.

That generally the parties don't talk to each other. They don't talk to each other in way that involves listening and understanding, they only talk to each other, they listen only in a completely tactical way. And they're mainly concerned with, when they say something they are not concerned with how this will sound to the adversary, but how it will sound to their own constituencies or sometimes to a third party. Now it's precisely that that we're trying to get away from. We're trying to get a situation in which communication can actually become a way in which people can learn something from each other. In which interaction, you know direct interaction can actually produce its potential of an emerging new product. Now since that's the essence of what we're doing, I believe in doing everything possible to protect that, and therefore taping, even if it were to be totally destroyed even if it makes something of a difference I've decided not to use it so far. We do however take careful notes. Sometime, somehow, and people know that of course, but somehow that is not, you know notes are different. Because that becomes your interpretation of what they are saying, but to put themselves on the tape is a different situation. So we take almost verbatim notes, I mean not verbatim but almost verbatim notes. And that incidentally is something, again to come back to the question of research, of evaluation that you asked before that's there, you could analyze that. I haven't done it systematically, again because, because of time mostly.

But that's there, and we could certainly use it. Now at the end of each day, or in fact at the end of, let's say at lunch time and then in evening generally the team, the third party team will get together and kind of review where we've gone and where we're going. And my typical procedure has been to start each session with an interpretive summary of what happened before. And that is really, those are my major interventions actually, at the beginning of the sessions. That's not necessarily the best way to do it, and the only way to do it, and I do you know intervene at other points too, but those have been, in fact those have been my major interventions. And of course people don't usually accept completely my interpretation of what happened and so that then becomes, is a discussion about what actually happened, you know with some differences and that helps to clarify certain things and then move us on. So these interpretive summaries have I think been very useful.

Peter Blanck: And, now what about the, well what you hope to do next? And how you can, I guess part of your goal must be to help people to learn some of the skills that you're learning if more of this is to go on, this type of action, conflict resolution research? What are the opportunities available, is it available in doctoral training, is it available in government service? And where do you hope to see the future of your own research go?

Herb Kelman: Ok well, let me start with what I hope to do next. I mean, I hope to do, what I hope to do next is really in a sense more of the same. But I, I feel that there is an opportunity in, which I think stems partly from political development, and partly from the development of my own work, I feel that there is an opportunity for the kind of approach that I'm using to become more directly plugged into the policy process. And what I'm really concentrating on, right now, is the pre-negotiation process. I'm focu-- you know substantively I'm focusing on the Palestinian issue, and starting with the proposition that

it is ess-- you know it is the core issue that must be resolved if there is to be genuine peace. And if for example the Egyptian/Israeli peace process, which I think is very significant, if it is to maintain and fulfill itself it must be widened. You know if must lead to a comprehensive peace for which, you know the solution for the Palestinian problem is central.

Now, and my argument is consistent with my whole approach, that part of that process, part of that process involves direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. I'm not saying that that is all that's involved because you know we are dealing with a multi-lateral process in which other parties, other Arab powers and the super powers and maybe some Europeans and so on, all play a role, there is no question about that. But part of the process must be direct negotiation between Israelis and Palestinians and there are tremendous barriers to that which I, you know can't go into right now. But what I am essentially doing, feel that I can do is to, is to contribute significantly to the pre-negotiation process. You know to, helping to create the conditions that would make negotiations possible and this involves working more directly with decision makers. Now this is not something I can do in a day, it is a process that I have been working on for sometime and will probably be continue to work on for some time more to come, but that really is what I'm, what I'm concentrating on. Now you come to your question of training, this has been a great frustration for me because the opportunity for training students and others in this are rather limited. For one thing because these workshops occur very very infrequently. You know I mean like what I'm doing now I've already been working on it for a year, and I may work on it for another year before I will ever get the parties together. And even when I do get them together the situation is so confidential because of what I already described, that I can't bring observers into it. You know I may be able to bring one student in to take notes, but I can't bring large numbers.

Now what I have, partly what I have done to to correct for that is to do workshops in, which you know I am doing one this coming spring, and I've done some before, in conjunction with my seminar on social psychological approaches to international relations I run a workshop. Now the one that we're doing, I'm hoping, no planning to do this spring is an Israeli/Palestinian workshop in fact. A couple of years ago I did one on the Cyprus conflict. Now these are, you know they are training workshops in the sense that I do not, you know I am not able to offer the same degree of confidentiality that I would for the other experiences because part of the purpose is to allow students to participate and to observe and so we are bringing in a larger group of observers. Now while the students are informed about the requirements of confidentiality and all of that, nevertheless you know when you have twenty people who are involved one way or another and some of whom are not really professionals, the chances of leakage and all of that are much greater, and I have to be completely honest to the participants in telling them that, you know this is part of an informed consent process. And so I therefore don't work with people who are at the same level, although the people that are involved are people who are significant. You know they are, they are you know senior graduate students or young professionals and you know they are people who are members of the elite in their own societies and so they are definitely significant people. But they are not at the same, they are not as close to the decision making process as the people that I work

with in the more, in the regular workshops. And these are, you know full scale workshops which I think do provide an opportunity for students to a, to get some practice in fact as being members of a third party team. See the students alternate in sitting around, sitting around the table as part of a third party team, and the rest of the time they sit behind the one way mirror and observe.

And of course they participate in all the other activities, you know pre-workshop sessions, the meals, social events that go with the workshop and so on. So these have been, have been I think, provided some opportunities for direct participation. Now on a larger scale I'm hoping that the proposal that is now before the Congress for a national peace academy will go through and that represents an effort to provide on a larger scale training in the whole array of conflict resolution third party techniques. You know mine is not the only approach. You know I, and I agree with I think there was an implication in the question that the way I'm going about things presents a bit of a problem for training because it requires so much specific involvement in the particular conflict. And that of course would be very difficult for, you know you can't train people, not many people have the kind of opportunity that I have to concentrate on one conflict. I mean I have that opportunity because I am working out of an academic base, and I'm pretty much running this as my research program and I could direct it in any way I want. But if people were to do this on a professional basis they would have to obviously be prepared to diversify much more. But I think this is possible. I think that in part you know I'm engaged really in a process of developing something new, and I I think that as it becomes more, more you know more fully formulated and systematized and so on, I think it should be possible for us to train people so they can work on more than one conflict at a time.

Peter Blanck: That's good. I want to, we don't have too much time. We're doing Dave McClelland after this, so I wonder if you could talk more to ethical issues and then finish with anything that you feel you would like to emphasize or that's important to you.

Herb Kelman: Well let me, let me just just say very briefly that there are, there are some very serious ethical issues involved, and I in fact, you know one of the things that I hope to do. As you know I've done a lot of writing on ethical issues in research, I have not done any writing yet on the ethical issues in my particular intervention model, per se. Not because I haven't thought about it, but because you know I just, it's a model that is still very much in the process of development. But the, the big protection here is that, that as far as you know not doing anything that might endanger people's interest. Maybe I should step back for a moment and say that in some respects we are dealing with very very, with ultimate kinds of ethical problems. For some of the people participation in the kinds of workshops that I organize, represents a, you know a real physical danger. In other words they may be putting their lives at risk, because they are involved, you know because participating in such an effort is a political act. And it's a controversial political act, so, so it's, it may be in extreme cases a, you know they may be risking their lives. At the very least they are risking their political fortunes. Or you know, their ability, their credibility within their own communities, their ability to have influence and so on. So there are serious risks involved for individuals.

There also are risks involved for the communities, you know for the societies because while what I'm trying to do is to separate communication as a learning process from communication as a political act. But in the outside world you can't do that and this is one of the reasons it's very hard for me to get people to participate. Because they, you know because communication is seen as a political act. With you know the most obvious thing being an implication that you're recognizing the other. For Israelis for example, to meet with certain Palestinians may imply that they are recognizing the PLO. For Palestinians to meet with certain Israelis may imply that they are recognizing Israel's legitimacy and so on. And so these are the barriers and the engaging in communication and you know, which are of course geared to the whole, you know while there is no, I do not take a political position per se, and the participants don't take a political position by participating in communication, the very communication itself is a political position, namely it implies that there is some value in direct communication between these two parties. So, so this may have implications for their political stance. So there are these kinds of risks: personal risks, political risks, and risks from the point of view of the, of their interests with respect to the conflict. Now, the protection here is that I'm dealing with people who are very aware of these risks.

You know they are politically involved people and they would not participate, and I have no hold over them. I mean the only possible hold that I have over people is that, in so far as I'm dealing with fellow academics or intellectuals, they want to appear as people who are reasonable, they want to appear to me as people who are reasonable and who are willing to talk and so on. So that's some degree, you know that is a degree of power that I have, you know but but I can assure you that is not gonna be, they're not going to decide to participate just in order to please me, or just in order to appear to me as people who are reasonable. They will decide to participate if they feel that the potential benefits of this are greater than the risks. And so because I don't have any real important power, you know and that I'm, basically I could only get people to participate if they decide that it is in their interest to do so, and that the risks, which are very real, are worth the potential benefits. So the kind of risk benefit analysis that one has to do is what I can expect these people to be doing because of the whole situation that they're in. Now my part of course is to be completely honest with them and to be honest in terms of what I will do and what I will not do and how much I can protect confidentiality and you know, be honest about the level of commitment by the other side and so on and so forth. I mean this, you know in other words I give, I give them all the relevant information about the procedure and about the possible consequences. I, now I, I'm very very meticulous about confidentiality, I'm very meticulous. On the other hand I never promise anyone 100% confidentiality because I know that I can't control the situation 100%, and when I'm doing the ones with students I'm very clear about saying that my usual promises about confidentiality must be reduced by a certain amount because I have less control in this situation. I have a very good record in terms of maintaining confidentiality, but I don't promise, I try not to promise something that I can't, that I can't deliver.

Peter Blanck: One final question now, what do you find, we end the interviews typically with what do you find most personally satisfying about what you're doing and personally

satisfying about the implications that it may have? Obviously you've expressed a lot of that already, but in a summary statement.

Herb Kelman: Well I guess the most personally satisfying is the fact that I feel that in this work I am using virtually everything that I, that I know, that I have learned, that I have been. You know virtually all elements of my identity, of my experience, of my training, of my skills and of my, you know theoretical knowledge and so on. Virtually all of it is really being utilized in this work. You know, just looking in terms, in terms of you know the most obvious part, my theoretical, my substantive knowledge, I've worked in the areas of attitude change and communication and social influence. I've worked in the areas of international, you know international relations and international conflict. And I've done some work in psychotherapy and group process and so on. Now all of these are coming together in this work, but in addition to that my, my long term interest in the Middle East and in Arab/Israeli conflict, which goes back to my own Jewish identity and my own background, my own Jewish, training in Jewish studies and all of that. My long term interest and involvement in the peace movement, and the development of non-violent approaches to conflict resolution and so on, all of these are really are really coming together. And I think this is, for me personally, it's the most exciting thing. It really gives me a sense of continuity in terms of my my life. Now in terms of its impact, if I can feel that I'm making even a small contribution to peace in the Middle East and therefore I think to peace more generally I feel that you know that's all I can really ask for.