Ethnic Stereotypic Attitudes Among Israeli Children: Two Intervention Programs

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The study examined stereotypic attitudes of Israeli children toward Arab and Jewish children and their alteration with two intervention programs implemented in the classroom, one textual and the other audiovisual. Participants completed stereotypic attribution questionnaires, prior to and following administration of the interventions and appropriate matched control programs, which were applied concurrently for 6 consecutive weeks. The assumption that Jewish children hold more negative stereotypic attitudes toward Arab than toward Jewish children was confirmed. The hypothesis that both programs reduce negative stereotypes for Arab children in the experimental as opposed to the control groups was confirmed. The programs were effective for ethnic stereotypes specifically and did not affect attributions evoked by sex of target. Theoretical and educational implications are discussed.

Many intergroup perceptions that are divisive and damaging are not based on group information, but rather are dependent on stereotype bias. The attribution of negative traits to a group can escalate into strong antipathies and impede attempts at resolution of conflict between groups. This consolidation of perceptual bias is not restricted to adults but also characterizes children's social categorizations. Not only do children's negative stereotypic perceptions constitute impassable barriers to contact between traditionally antagonistic groups, but altercations in their content may lag behind changing social realities. The present study was focused on the stereotypic attributions of Israeli children toward Arab and toward Jewish children in an attempt to examine one of the mechanisms underlying antipathy between ethnic groups. In addition, prompted by the changing social realities emerging from the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, interventions to change these stereotypes were explored.

The concept of stereotypes describes the human tendency to resort to a simplified image of a given social group in the face of a complex social reality (Mackie & Hamilton, 1993). Stereotypes frequently include negative evaluative overtones due to the underlying motivational need to evaluate one's ingroup positively and to devalue outgroups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). A large corpus of work supports the idea that the baseline conditions for intergroup competition are so minimal as to suggest that it is a process inherent in the intergroup situation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Research on ingroup–outgroup categorization has shown that there is a tendency to evaluate outgroup members at the extremes of various psychological characteristics and to implement differential selective processing and retention of information for ingroup as opposed to outgroup members (Hamilton & Troler, 1986). Outgroups can be conceptualized as spreading out along a spectrum of distance from the ingroup. The term social distance describes the degree of closeness that members of one group feel toward members of another group, ranging from desire for closeness to desire for distance (Yuchtman-Yaar & Inbar, 1986). There is a correlation between widening social distance between groups and more extreme attributions and increased negativity toward the outgroup. In a study conducted in Israel, Jewish children perceived Jews as belonging to a closer and safer group and attributed less negative stereotypes to them, as opposed to Arabs, who were perceived as more distant and threatening and aroused more stereotypic attributions (Yuchtman-Yaar & Inbar, 1986).

Analysis of intergroup phenomena necessitates cognizance of the relation between stereotyping and prejudice. The stereotype is a cognitive structure determined by categorization that organizes and represents information about social categories (Bar-Tal, Graumann, Kruglanski, & Stroebel, 1989). Some appraisals of the notion of prejudice have evolved into its conceptualization as a possible outcome of the same basic cognitive process of categorization (Duckitt, 1992). In this view, stereotypes play a crucial role in biasing information processing and social behavior, which could lead to discriminatory behavior (Hamilton & Troler, 1986). The stereotype may be seen as a cognitive component of prejudice, existing alongside affective and behavioral components, and could result in frequently hostile and discriminatory behavior toward outgroup members (Bar-Tal et al., 1989).

The view that prejudice is rooted in inherent fundamentals of psychological functioning implies its pervasive nature, both for adults and children. The appearance of prejudice among children raises the issue of its acquisition and transmission. Several explanatory models have been advanced ranging from direct parental or social agency socialization...
(Spencer, 1983) to the linkage of prejudice to broader cognitive and affective developmental processes (Aboud, 1988; Vaughan, 1987). The simple learning model view that children absorb prevailing prejudices of adult society is incompatible with research showing the early emergence of ethnic category awareness and use (Katz, 1987), the curvilinear nature of developmental trajectories of prejudiced thinking in childhood (Asher & Allen, 1969; Vaughan, 1964), and the weak evidence for unidirectional parent-child transmission of intergroup attitudes (Branch & Newcombe, 1980; Davey, 1983). This suggests a more dynamic model in which both parents and children seek actively to understand and evaluate their social world and orient themselves within it. The forging of patterns of beliefs and behavior is further compounded by the way in which the particular environment is partitioned into socially meaningful categories such as gender, ethnicity, and age. Thus, biases and preferences are the natural outgrowth of a developing interaction between the environment and the psychological processes of categorization, identification, and comparison.

The potential divisive effect of stereotypic perceptions in terms of outgroup hostility and prejudice, even among children, connotes the need to examine ways to minimize negative stereotypic attributions. In view of this, the present study was motivated by two foci. The first was to examine empirically the existence of negative ethnic stereotypic attitudes among Israeli children. The second was to construct two intervention programs for the reduction of ethnic stereotypic attitudes that could be implemented in the classroom, and to examine their efficacy.

Children living in Israel face a complex situation in terms of stereotypical attributions. Since the establishment of the state of Israel, the dominant societal ethos has been characterized by elevated national and ethnic awareness (Arian, 1995a). Nonetheless, Israel is a pluralistic society constituted by different religious and secular Jewish groups, new immigrants from diverse backgrounds and Israeli Arabs. Recently, Israel has embarked on peace negotiations with its Arab neighbors with whom there has been a history of hostile confrontation. This multifaceted situation has fostered heightened recognition of the different groupings that constitute the population, producing inevitable distortions in group perception.

One group that commonly elicits stereotypical attributions in Israel is that termed “the Arabs” (Bar-Tal, 1988). Although this group is comprised of several subgroups who have different physical, geographical, and cultural characteristics, many Israelis attribute negative stereotypes to “Arabs,” making almost no differentiation among them (Bar-Tal, 1988).

The Arab population living within Israel was granted citizenship when the state was established in 1948 and currently constitutes approx-imately 16% of its citizens (Rouhana & Fiske, 1995). Within Israel, Jewish-Arab relations are complex, guided by the contradictory ideological principles of preserving Israel as a Jewish state, upholding democracy, and negotiating profound security concerns with surrounding Arab countries (Rouhana, 1989). These differing interests have nurtured strained Jewish-Arab relations, particularly in the domains of land ownership, distribution of resources, share in the power base, and roles and identities (Rouhana & Fiske, 1995), and are compounded further by the currently central Israeli-Palestinian conflict regarding relinquishment of the West Bank.

Studies have yielded evidence of widespread prejudiced perceptions of Arabs as a threat to the state (Arian, 1995b) for both physical and characterological dimensions (Peled & Bar-Gal, 1983). The peace agreement with Egypt in 1977, which altered Israeli-Arab relations, was reflected in more positive perceptions of Arabs, although some negative stereotypes have continued unabated (Peled & Bar-Gal, 1983).

Surprisingly, very little work on children's ethnic prejudice has been conducted in Israel, although the few studies conducted have revealed a comparable picture to that found for adults. Approximately 80% of children sampled reported negative associations to the term “Arab,” which extended to external appearance, occupation, and security threat (Cohen, 1985; Dinner, 1993). Analysis of Arab figures appearing in children’s dreams showed them devoid of personal characterization and identified them as criminals with grim, frightening facial expressions. Dream material of interactions with Arabs was usually hostile in nature and redolent with aggression (Bilu, 1989).

In a series of studies delineating Israeli children's knowledge of and attitudes toward Arabs, Bar-Tal (1996) found very early development of this social categorization, which was rife with negative connotations. Even young children described Arabs primarily in terms of violent and aggressive behavior, although older children used more elaborated categories that differentiated Arabs into good and bad. This analysis demonstrates the extension to children of traditionally negative Israeli stereotypic attitudes toward Arabs.

Alteration of negative ethnic stereotypic attitudes is particularly pressing for Israeli children because they will inherit the political changes in the area. In view of this, several recent intervention programs have been instigated aimed at minimizing stereotypic attitudes. The technique most widely applied has been contact with outgroup members (Olson & Zanna, 1993). This approach posits that contact between different ethnic groups may lead to differentiation in stereotypes and more peer relationships, and consequently to mutual changes in attitudes and reduced pre-
conceptions, conflict, and tension (Amir & Ben Ari, 1987). In Israel, diverse Jewish-Arab encounters have been constructed, ranging from provision of opportunities for brief contact, through joint participation in social activities, to systematic meetings evoking meaningful dialogues (Peled & Bar-Gal, 1983). Although the process is frequently long and laborious, most attempts have yielded some positive results (Bar-Gal & Bar, 1992; Yogeit, Ben-Yehoshua, & Alper, 1991). In general, although contact with other ethnic groups can be useful, it appears vital that it is accompanied by educational programs dealing directly with conflict issues.

Orchestrations of Jewish-Arab encounters, particularly between children, is laden with logistic difficulties, including geographical distances, language problems, and lack of funds. Even if these difficulties could be addressed, these encounters would necessarily remain small scale, with limited scope, and would not constitute a viable educational tool. Therefore, the motivation underlying the present study was to examine the efficacy of engendering indirect contact between Israeli and Arab children through filmed and written rather than personal encounters. These encounters were constructed within the orbit of two intervention programs, one textual and the other audiovisual, both of which depicted stories of relationships between Jewish Israeli and Arab children. The aim of the two programs, which can be implemented in the classroom, was to provide an educational experience that could reduce cross-ethnic stereotypical attributions of Jewish children toward Arab children.

The textual program was based on the concept of bibliotherapy, which utilizes reading of texts to produce affective change and to promote personality growth and development (Lenkowsky, 1987). Bibliotherapy has been found to consist of several processes, including identification and projection, which facilitate catharsis and insight in which the reader internalizes new perceptions and ideas within a supportive environment (Cohen, 1990; Kobobi, 1992). Despite its merit, bibliotherapy techniques have been evaluated only with regard to short-term outcomes (Warner, 1980), although it appears that multiple exposures are crucial for the desired emotional and cognitive learning (Cohen, 1995). These findings point to the suitability of a bibliotherapy-based program as a tool on the one hand, and on the other hand, to the need for objective, methodologically sound research into its efficacy and applicability. The choice of a textual intervention for the reduction of negative ethnic stereotypic attitudes was predicated on the assumption that reading is a basic classroom activity which stimulates and makes accessible inner thoughts and feelings and promotes sensitivity toward others (Cohen, 1990).

The second program, termed an audiovisual program, paralleled the textual intervention in all respects, but utilized excerpts from filmed rather than textual materials depicting encounters between Jewish Israeli and Arab children, with the rationale that stories represented visually could evoke the same responses as those represented textually. This is supported by studies suggesting that one way television impacts on children is through identification with portrayed characters. A large body of research on exposure to nontraditional or counterstereotypic portrayals has shown that television programs, such as the “Freestyle” program depicting counterstereotypic models, was effective in changing children’s attitudes about behavior considered sex appropriate but less effective in changing children’s interests in nontraditional pursuits (Johnstone & Ettema, 1982). Other studies have demonstrated the effects of less extensive counterstereotypic portrayals. It appears that even minimal exposure to selected educational television segments can lead to at least short-term changes in intergroup racial attitudes and play behavior among preschoolers (Goldberg & Gorn, 1979). In contrast, some studies have found counterstereotypic portrayals to have little impact and suggest the need to differentiate between attitudinal and behavioral effects (Morgan, 1987).

Thus, the focus of the present study was the investigation of the stereotypic attitudes held by Jewish children toward Arab and toward Jewish children and the attempt to change them by means of intervention programs that can be implemented in the classroom. The motivation to include an assessment of stereotypic attributions to Jewish children was to ascertain whether negative stereotypes are assigned specifically to Arabs. Given the pluralistic nature of Israeli society, which includes children from different cultural and historical backgrounds such as from Ethiopian, Russian, North-African, and Eastern-European origin who might have different physical characteristics, religious practices, and socioeconomic status, some differences might exist between the Israeli character and the participants. The research consisted of an examination of two concurrently applied programs constructed for the study, one audiovisual and the other textual, each of which was examined in comparison to an appropriate matched control program.

The study posited one underlying assumption and one central hypothesis. The assumption was that Jewish children hold more negative stereotypic attributions toward Arab than toward Jewish children. The central hypothesis stated that the intervention programs will reduce negative stereotypic perceptions of Arab children in the experimental as opposed to the control groups. Further, in light of the fact that both the assessment instrument and interventions were balanced for male and
female characters, and that much work on stereotypes has traditionally been concerned with gender and ethnicity, an exploratory question regarding gender was raised for which directional hypotheses were not proposed. The influence was examined of the sex of the character on negative attributions and their change as a result of the intervention programs.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

Participants were 209 Jewish Israeli schoolchildren, approximately half in each program. The age range of the children in both programs was 10 to 12 years, with a mean age of 10.9 in the audiovisual program and 11.2 in the textual program. All participants were fifth-grade pupils from two different schools. Children were all from families of middle-class socioeconomic status living in small Israeli towns and, in terms of religiousness, were from conservative and secular backgrounds. Like most Israeli children, the participants had never had any real contact with Arab children. Written consent to conduct the study was received from the relevant supervisor in the Ministry of Education, the principals of the schools, teachers, parents, and children. In both schools, classes were randomly divided into two experimental groups, one for the audiovisual and one for the textual program, and two control groups, one for each program. There were no differences between the experimental and control groups on any demographic variables (see Table 1).

**Instrument**

The questionnaire about stereotypic attributions used in this study was a modified version of a scale developed by Dinner (1993) that originally consisted of pictures of Arab and Jewish men and investigated participants' inferences of the character and behavior of the figures using the semantic differential technique (Suci & Osgood, 1957). The language of the original questionnaire was adapted to suit the present research population, and the format was improved to eliminate any possibility of bias. The main modification was that the original pictures, which depicted four different adult men, were replaced with pictures of boys and girls.

The questionnaire in its current version consisted of four pictures, two male characters (or "targets") and two female ones. The same Jewish Israeli boy and girl were pictured, but in one set the children were depicted wearing characteristically Arab articles of clothing (kaffiyeh or head cover) and in the other picture the children were not wearing this article of clothing. In this way, each set of pictures was identical in every sense except for cues of ethnicity, thus not biasing or directing participants' responses in any way. Each picture was accompanied by an identical set of 10 questions that examined, using the semantic differential technique, the stereotypes attributed to the photographed children on a scale of 0 (least negative) to 5 (most negative). The items were: clever-stupid, diligent-lazy, kind-cruel, frightening—not frightening, sociable—unsociable, generous—selfish, trustworthy—untrustworthy, brave—cowardly, law abiding—not law abiding, clean—dirty. Children responded to the questionnaire eight times, once for each of the four characters on the pretest and once for each of the four targets on the posttest. At each administration, questionnaires were counterbalanced for targets to avoid response set. On each questionnaire, a mean score was derived for the set of 10 questions separately for each character: Jewish male, Jewish female, Arab male, and Arab female. Each of these scores represents an overall bias score for each character in which the higher the score, the more negative the stereotypic attribution. This produced eight overall bias scores for each subject, one for each of the four targets on the pretest and one for each of the four targets on the posttest. These scores served as eight dependent variables for each subject in the within-subject design (2 × 2, Time × Ethnic group of target × Sex of target). Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the eight measures of the questionnaire (Arab male and Arab female, Jewish male and Jewish female, pre- and postintervention for each character), ranged from 0.80 to 0.91, indicating good internal consistency for all measures. These high alpha coefficients further justified the use of a mean overall bias score for each of the eight measures.

**Interventions**

The two intervention programs used in this study were constructed on the basis of the bibliotherapy model developed by Cohen (1990) and Koboli (1992). Each session begins with the reading of a text and discussion of its content and extends to a discussion of personal and emotional responses to the issues raised, in an open and tolerant atmosphere. In the
such contact, and conflicts and fears surrounding it. The selected excerpts emphasized characters' individual rather than group identity and highlighted similarities between Arabs and Israelis rather than differences, particularly the common dilemmas and conflicts facing both groups in general and in relation to each other. For example, one excerpt told the story of the difficulties of an Arab girl who studies at a Jewish boarding school. Another excerpt dealt with the relationship between two 12-year-old girls, one Arab and one Jewish, against the background of the evacuation of land returned to Egypt as part of the peace treaty. The excerpt describes the conflicts and feelings that arise for the girls about the loss of their homes and their pending separation, and ends on an optimistic note.

Control programs. The control programs for both interventions consisted of stories and films dealing with plants and animals, excerpted from National Geographic productions that were of informational, biological nature. The control and experimental programs were matched on all technical dimensions such as length of stimulus presentation, duration of session, division of session into stimulus and discussion time, and age appropriateness. In this way, the control programs were as similar to the experimental programs as possible, except for the content of the literary text and the filmed excerpt.

Procedure

The programs were administered at the two schools during school hours on a weekly basis. Each program and its control was administered by an independent experimenter. In each study, both the experimental and control groups met with the experimenter eight times. In each case, at the first meeting the experimenter introduced herself and administered the pretest questionnaires. Over the next six meetings, which took place over 6 consecutive weeks, the experimenters administered the intervention programs concurrently. The duration of each session was 45 min, which was divided into two structural sections. During the first 15 min, the experimenters showed a video in the audiovisual and matched control program or read aloud a short story in the textual and matched control program. During the remaining 30 min, the experimenters directed a class discussion relating to the video that had been viewed or the literary piece that had been read, concluding with a summary of the discussion, devoid of the experimenters' personal opinions. The only difference between the programs in the experimental and control groups was the content of the video viewed or the text read. Class teachers were present at all the intervention meetings but did not participate. During the eighth and final meeting, the first 20 min were devoted to administration of the

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Prior to commencement of the study, a pilot study was conducted in which both programs were administered in two different nonexperimental classes to ensure their comprehensibility and clarity and to assess children's ability to deal with the literary and audiovisual texts and to participate in the ensuing class discussion. Programs were modified to address the few age-appropriate issues of clarity that arose in the pilot study.
RESULTS

The underlying assumption was that stereotypic attributions toward Arab characters (male and female) would be more negative than those toward Jewish characters (male and female) before the intervention programs. This assumption was examined for the audiovisual and textual samples using a 2 × 2 × 2 MANOVA, with ethnicity (Jewish and Arab) and sex as the within-subject factors and type of intervention as the between-subject factor. A MANOVA was used because there were four pretest scores for each subject, one for each character, Jewish and Arab male and Jewish and Arab female characters. The assumption was examined using the pretest scores only.

As expected, the underlying assumption was confirmed with a main effect of nation, $F_{(1,20)} = 30.5, p < .001$. Pretest scores for Jewish characters ($M = 3.32, SD = 0.43$) were significantly less negative than for Arab characters ($M = 3.56, SD = 0.65$). In addition, an interaction between sex and nation, $F_{(1,20)} = 26.36, p < .001$ was found. Scheffé post hoc comparisons showed that for Jewish males ($M = 3.5, SD = 0.56$) stereotypic attributions were significantly more negative ($p < .00001$) than for Jewish females ($M = 3.14, SD = 0.49$). For Arab characters, no significant differences emerged between males ($M = 3.6, SD = 0.71$) and females ($M = 3.51, SD = 0.72$). No further interactions emerged. For both the audiovisual and textual interventions, Scheffé post hoc comparisons revealed no significant differences between the experimental and the control groups on pretest stereotypic attributions for the Jewish and Arab characters.

The central hypothesis stated that the intervention programs will reduce negative stereotypic attributions toward Arab targets in the experimental as opposed to the control groups. The hypothesis and the exploratory question were examined using 2 × 2 × 2 MANOVAs, in which the between-subject factors were type of intervention (audiovisual vs. textual) and group (experimental vs. control), and the withinsubject factors were time (before vs. after intervention), sex of target, and ethnic group of target (Jewish vs. Arab).

In this main analysis, the interactions of relevance include the effects for groups (experimental vs. control), time (before vs. after intervention) and ethnicity of character (Jewish vs. Arab). The interactions between these three factors would indicate that the interventions were effective in changing stereotypic attributions more for Arab than for Jewish characters.

Higher order interactions including these three factors would indicate more specific effects of this interaction. Because the questionnaires presented both male and female characters, a main effect for sex, or interactions including group, time, and sex are also relevant.

The MANOVA revealed significant main effects for group, $F_{(1,20)} = 8.05, p < .005$, with posttest scores for the experimental group ($M = 3.31, SD = 0.43$) less negative than those for the control group ($M = 3.48, SD = 0.44$). There was also a main effect for time, $F_{(1,20)} = 14.62, p < .001$, in which pretest scores ($M = 3.45, SD = 0.45$) were more negative than posttest scores ($M = 3.34, SD = 0.53$). A main effect for sex, $F_{(1,20)} = 46.40, p < .001$, showed more negative attributions toward male ($M = 3.49, SD = 0.48$) than toward female characters ($M = 3.3, SD = 0.48$); and a main effect for ethnicity, $F_{(1,20)} = 29.0, p < .001$, showed more negative attributions toward Arab ($M = 3.4, SD = 0.61$) than toward Jewish characters ($M = 3.29, SD = 0.42$) on posttest scores.

The analysis for the central hypothesis revealed a significant interaction between group, time, and ethnicity, $F_{(1,20)} = 18.07, p < .001$. Post hoc Scheffé comparisons were used to examine the source of this interaction. For Jewish characters in the control condition, no significant difference was found between pretest ($M = 3.35, SD = 0.41$) and posttest scores ($M = 3.35, SD = 0.54$). However, unexpectedly, for Arab characters in the control condition, significantly more negative attributions were found ($p < .05$) in the posttest ($M = 3.66, SD = 0.72$) than in the pretest ($M = 3.57, SD = 0.64$).

In the experimental condition, stereotypic attributions toward Arabs were significantly more negative ($p < .00001$) in the posttest ($M = 3.2, SD = 0.63$) than in the pretest ($M = 3.58, SD = 0.67$). For Jewish characters, stereotypic attributions also were significantly less negative ($p < .0005$) in the posttest ($M = 3.16, SD = 0.47$) than in the pretest ($M = 3.31, SD = 0.45$). Although both comparisons were significant, inspection of the means showed that the change in stereotypic attributions for Arab characters was greater. No meaningful higher order interactions including either group, time, and ethnicity of character or time, group, and sex of character were significant.

The comparison of attributions to the male and female characters, prior and subsequent to the interventions in the experimental as opposed to the control groups, revealed that there was no significant interaction between group, time, and sex ($p = .78$). This means that the efficacy of the intervention was specific for ethnic stereotypic attitudes and did not affect sex stereotypic attributions.

Several unmeaningful interactions were found that do not warrant interpretation. These were: Group × Time, $F_{(1,20)} = 28.74, p < .001$;
Figure 1. Experimental group means of negative stereotypic attributions toward Arab and Jewish targets before and after the interventions.

Group × Time × Intervention, $F_{(1,200)} = 8.63, p < .005$; Intervention × Ethnicity, $F_{(1,200)} = 13.69, p < .001$; Time × Sex, $F_{(1,200)} = 4.01, p < .05$; Time × Ethnicity × Intervention, $F_{(1,200)} = 4.73, p < .05$; Sex × Ethnicity, $F_{(1,200)} = 28.73, p < .001$; and Sex × Ethnicity × Group, $F_{(1,200)} = 9.10, p < .005$.

Although no four-way interaction emerged between group, intervention, time, and ethnicity, qualitative experience during administration of the interventions suggested that the audiovisual program was the more effective of the two. This was reinforced by examination of the means, which revealed that the audiovisual program was more specific than the textual program because its effect was restricted to negative stereotypic attributions toward Arab characters only, whereas the textual program had a more diffuse effect on both Jewish and Arab characters. This is illustrated in Figure 1, which presents means of negative stereotypic attributions toward Jewish and Arab characters of the experimental groups in each program.

DISCUSSION

The underlying assumption of the study, that Israeli children attribute more negative stereotypes to Arab than to Jewish characters was confirmed. Approximately 40% of the children considered the Arab targets to be extremely unreliable, dirty, not law abiding, frightening, stupid, and unsociable. In contrast, the most extreme attributions toward the Jewish characters were that they were unreliable and timid. These findings furnish some support for the concept of social distance, which posits a correlation between ingroup and outgroup distance and increased negative attributions toward outgroup members (Yuchtman-Yaar & Inbar, 1986). They also suggest that ethnicity is a primary factor in determining social distance between groups.

Methodologically, our assessment measure represented a more controlled instrument than the original version on which it was based (Dinner, 1993). Presentation of the same child in the character pictures, dressed once with a typically Arab article of clothing and once without it, ensured that ethnic cues were the only stimulus difference. This fortifies the credence of our findings of differential attributions for the pictures in each set, Jewish and Arab male and Jewish and Arab female.

However, note should be taken of general problems incurred in measuring stereotypic attributions. The current study utilized a semantic differential measure that, although an acceptable technique for examination of stereotypes, is restricted to forced-choice characterological attributions, which reflect a rather shallow picture, and does not encompass other types of inferences and judgments. Correction of this limitation depends on the development of more sophisticated assessment procedures that retain their viability and appropriateness for use with children. Further, the possibility that both intervention programs produced a consensus regarding the expected response in the posttest questionnaire, rather than a real change in stereotypic attribution, cannot be entirely dismissed.

The central hypothesis that the intervention programs improve negative stereotypic perceptions of Arab characters in the experimental and not in the control groups was confirmed. Results indicated a significant reduction in negative stereotypic attributions toward Arabs for both intervention programs. Although the statistically significant changes in stereotypic attributions were small, this result is meaningful in light of the fact that the study represents a first attempt to change on a large scale deeply ingrained stereotypic attitudes toward Arabs among children. Despite the numerically small changes, the study bears witness to the facility and rapidity with which negative attributions were altered by the institution of short-term and easily administered programs in the educational setting. This is compounded by the fact that, in the control group, attributions toward Arabs were significantly more negative in the posttest than in the pretest. One interpretation for this may be that, with the passage of time, the political climate actually precipitated increasingly negative attributions toward
Arabs. In this circumstance, the ability of the programs not only to halt the process of increasing negativity, but to turn the tide toward less negative attributions than at the pretest, attains greater significance.

The experimenters' subjective experience during administration of the interventions suggested that the audiovisual program was more readily accepted by the participants and was more effective than the textual program. The results alluded to this qualitative experience, although they were not statistically significant. A possible reason for this perception may be that television is a vivid and lifelike visual stimulus, and children may have found this medium more immediate and natural. The identification mechanism, which is so central to both programs, may have been more efficiently mobilized by television than by text. This speculation is supported by findings that television is particularly adept at influencing children by means of identification with counterstereotypic characters (Johnstone & Ettema, 1982). Imagery and symbols on television generally allow viewers to derive meaning with less effort than required with reading, which demands more focused concentration, a greater facility with language and recall of vocabulary, and a mastery of all reading and comprehension skills (Van Evra, 1990). Children may recognize the fictional status of print more easily than television material, possibly due to television's strong visual input, action, and imitation of real life (Kelly, 1981; Salomon, 1984), which could promote direct humanization of television characters and facility of identification with them.

The debate regarding the source of the undeniable impact of television on children warrants attention when constructing this type of intervention program. It has been posited that pictures are a more natural means of communication than words because they enable a message to be perceived, rather than comprehended or conceived (Postman, 1979). One of the implications of the finding that young children can identify a picture of a cat, but not the accompanying word in a picture book, indicates that visual literacy precedes print literacy, possibly due to its immediacy and its proximity to perceptions of the natural world (Messenger Davies, 1997). Thus, television may be a staple object of thought for children, through which developing cognitive capacities are channeled and applied (Hodge & Tripp, 1986).

Comparative studies of children's responses to different media have found that comprehension and memory for a story were generally better for television material than for radio or text, despite a higher level of attention in the latter (Pezdek, Lehrer, & Simon, 1984). The explanation for these findings included the supposition that in television, auditory and visual components are processed together as an integrated whole, rather than independently, as is the case in reading.

The efficacy of the interventions suggests the promise inherent in the expansion of the bibliotherapy model to different media. Further attempts might include the construction and application of intervention programs based on auditory stimuli, such as radio, or purely visual stimuli, such as pictures or illustrations.

The decreased negative stereotypic attributions subsequent to both programs hold both theoretical and educational implications. Theoretically, they are congruent with the notion that although social categorization and stereotyping may be basic universal human tendencies, the strength of stereotypic attitudes is malleable and can be modified and reduced.

Educational implications relate to the utility of these interventions in the school. The facility and success of administration of the programs in the classroom reinforce that the educational system can function as an environment where children are helped to address ethical and moral issues. This entails viewing of schooling as extending beyond the teaching of content to encompass areas related to ethics and values. This broad approach to learning has been termed philosophical teaching, in which the classroom is viewed as a potential "community of ethical inquiry," a group that reflects on ethical issues. One suggested method of addressing philosophical questions in the classroom is the presentation and discussion of novels, films, poetry, short stories, "or any media that are studded with philosophical and logical themes and can interest and motivate children to inquiry" (Sharp, 1984, p. 5). The use of such material in the classroom has been shown to have important moral-educational implications. For example, in a study of the effects of prosocial story content, children were told stories dealing with helping behavior and giving to others, followed by group discussion. Compared with children in a control group who heard and discussed stories without prosocial content, the experimental group children behaved more prosocially (Vandenplas-Holper, 1990). The educational philosophy embodied in this study closely approximates the rationale behind the current programs.

By its very nature, the educational system transmits moral and ethical codes to children indirectly, for example, by selective choice of content and formats for instruction and by modeling on authority figures. Curriculum materials can influence children in domains beyond the immediate focus of their content. An illustration of the potential power of this influence emerged in a study of representations of Arabs and Jewish-Arab relations in textbook contents in Israel (Bar-Tal & Zoltek, 1989). Very little space had been devoted to these issues, and, when mentioned, they were not discussed neutrally or on an interpersonal level but rather in a national sense and in the context of hostility. In more than half the text-
books examined, Arabs were described in negative terms. This demonstrates the way in which stereotypic biases may be embedded inadvertently, and perpetuated within children’s formative knowledge systems.

The present study also raised the exploratory question of the influence of sex of character on stereotypic attributions and their alterations as a result of the intervention. Because both the assessment measure and the program contents utilized balanced male and female figures, in a tangential way, the interventions could have produced an interaction between stereotypic attributions and character sex and ethnic group that would be measurable. This examination revealed that the intervention was specific for ethnic stereotypic attitudes and did not affect sex-based stereotypes. Possibly, sex stereotypes represent a more basic categorization into two clearly defined groups—male and female, or they may be more strongly inculturated and ingrained than ethnic stereotypes, producing greater resistance to alteration. Possibly a program of longer duration, or alternately one specifically directed at changing sex stereotypes, may be more effective in this regard. A related area that warrants further examination is the interaction between sex of the subject and sex of the character. However, these data are beyond the scope of the current focus.

One methodological limitation of the study pertained to the lack of a delayed posttest to assess long-term effects of the programs. The administration of a delayed posttest was curtailed by logistic difficulties in the present study but should be addressed in further research. A related concern is that the current design did not permit projections of possible behavioral change, beyond the narrow focus on characterological attributions. This issue is prevalent in much research on stereotypes (Morgan, 1987). Although it appears reasonable to infer the existence of flexibility in the attribution of stereotypic characteristics, it is not possible to assume that this extends to more consolidated attitudes or that it translates into behavior. However, the present findings can be seen as a first step in inculcating an informed directive toward moderation of discriminatory stereotypic attributions among children.

The results of this study bring into focus the need to invest in programs which can reduce stereotypes that may have destructive intergroup ramifications for Israeli children. The results also establish that personal encounters are not the only means of humanizing the “enemy.” Exposure to encounters by video and text, followed by open and constructive group discussion, are sufficient to narrow the distance between two ethnic groups. The facility with which changes in stereotypic perception occurred among children suggests the particular applicability of these programs in the formative years, when attitudes and behaviors are still relatively malleable. Furthermore, these programs prove that this type of undertaking is neither costly nor overly complicated.

The findings reinforce that there is a margin of plasticity in Israeli children’s stereotypic perceptions that can be exploited to reduce prejudice and animosity between Arabs and Jews. This is particularly pressing at the current historical juncture, with both nations striving to attain a peaceful resolution to the long-standing and hostile dispute between them. Furthermore, the children represent the generation of Israelis who will inherit the political changes in the area, and this makes the investment of educational resources undeniably worthwhile.

REFERENCES


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**Changing Ethnic Stereotypes**


