The effect of a major event on stereotyping: terrorist attacks in Israel and Israeli adolescents’ perceptions of Palestinians, Jordanians and Arabs

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Abstract

This study examines the effect of a major event (terrorist attacks) on the stereotypic perceptions, attitudes and affects of 119 Israeli adolescents (56 males and 63 females of 5th and 8th grades) toward three target groups: (a) Palestinians, who still have conflictive relations with the Israelis (Palestinian extremists carried out the attacks), (b) Jordanians, who have peaceful relations with the Israelis and (c) Arabs, in general, who are considered a subcategory including Arabs of all nations. The questionnaires were administered to the same adolescents three times: during a relatively peaceful spell in Israeli–Palestinian relations; one day following two terrorist attacks, and three months thereafter. In the last administration adolescents’ need for closure was also measured. Adolescents’ perceptions, attitudes and affect toward the three target group were differentiated—relating to Palestinians most negatively and to Jordanians most positively. Also, following the terrorist attacks, stereotypic perceptions and attitudes changed in a negative direction, in relation to all the three groups; again with expressed differentiation among the three groups. In the third measurement, some measures remained negative, but some changed to be more positive. Only few effects of age were detected and several significant correlation with need for closure were found. These results indicate that stereotypes and attitudes toward outgroups are context-dependent, influenced by events; thus they serve as ‘a seismograph’ to the quality of intergroup relations at any given time. Copyright © 2001 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

One of the key issues in the study of stereotyping is the delineation of conditions and situations which change the contents of held stereotypes (e.g. Allport, 1954; Bar-Tal, 1997; Ellemers & van Knippenberg; 1997; Pettigrew, 1998). This involves, on the one hand, the types of active interventions which facilitate change in stereotypic contents, and, on the other, real-world events, experiences or information which influence stereotypic perceptions. The present study focuses on the second line of

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research: It examines the effect of a major event (i.e. terrorist attack) on the stereotypes toward groups relevant to this event. This particular direction has been largely disregarded in social psychology.

Years ago, Sherif and his colleagues, in a series of experiments (Sherif, 1966; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961) were the first to demonstrate experimentally that events which take place in the context of intergroup relations affect the mutual stereotypic perceptions of groups. Also, a number of nonexperimental studies showed that nations changed their stereotypes as a result of major events, which took place in the context of the intergroup relations (e.g. Benyamini, 1981; Buchanan, 1951; Dudycha, 1942; Seago, 1947; Sinha & Upadhyaya, 1960). This line of research is supported by the realistic conflict theory, which suggests that stereotypes reflect real conflicts over power or scarce resources such as territory, natural resources, or trade. In a situation of conflict, the parties involved develop hostility, as well as negative stereotyping and prejudice (Bar-Tal, 1990; Bobo, 1988; LeVine & Campbell, 1972).

In general, this theory suggests that stereotypic contents are influenced by the nature of relations between groups (Bar-Tal, 1997), which is determined by accumulated events that can have either negative or positive meaning for the relations. But, as Sherif et al. (1961) demonstrated, although stereotypes are shaped by the nature of long-term intergroup relations, they also are affected, sometimes even briefly, by short-term major events that occur in the context of the relations between the groups. Stereotypes, therefore, serve as a ‘seismograph’ of intergroup relations at any given time, since they change in response to information derived from major events pertaining to intergroup relations.

This assumption is not surprising in view of the fact that social cognitive literature showed that confirming or disconfirming information acquired about a target group leads to an adjustment in the stereotypic beliefs (see for example, Hewstone, Johnston, & Aird, 1992; Mackie, Allison, Worth, & Asuncion, 1992; Rothbart, 1981). However, not all information influences the content of stereotypes. It can be assumed that major information related to the target group, which cannot be disregarded, will either strengthen or weaken the existing stereotypes, depending on whether the information confirms or disconfirms them. The present study intends to focus on major information coming from real-life events and examines how this information influences stereotypic perception.

The effect of major information on stereotypic perception depends on different factors. One factor affecting change of stereotypes is related to the type of situation from which the person infers the relevant information about the other group. In real-life situations, individuals incur different situations involving various groups from which relevant information to held stereotypes can be inferred. The focus of the present study concerns major events occurring in an intergroup context. Major events are defined as extraordinary events, relevant to group members’ lives, which are widely publicized through group’s channels of communication and provide information that cannot be disregarded. Examples of major events are military, violent engagements, terrorist attacks, territorial conquest, signing peace agreements, peaceful statement of an enemy’s leader, atrocities performed, etc. Major events differ with regard to their characteristics and therefore they have differential influence on the stereotypes held by group members. The following characteristics of major events in intergroup context are of importance for studying their effects:

1. **Duration of the event**—the longer the major event, the more influence it may have on the stereotypes.
2. **Level of trauma**—traumatic events, causing experiences of stress (Koopman, 1997) have more influence on the stereotypes than nontraumatic events.
3. **Evaluative nature of the event**—events providing negative meaning have more influence on the stereotypes than events providing positive meaning (Ito, Larsen, Smith & Cacioppo, 1998).
(4) *Ambiguity of the event*—the more ambiguous the event, the less influence it has on the stereotypes.

(5) *Correspondence with the held stereotype*—events whose meaning corresponds to the stereotypes strengthen the confidence in their contents, while events whose meaning does not correspond to the stereotypes weaken the confidence in the their contents.

It can be assumed, for example, that an unambiguously positive, powerful event which contradicts a person’s negative stereotypes may change them somewhat for the better, at least for a short period of time, if additional events will not come to support this change. An unambiguously negative, powerful event which is in line with negative, held stereotypes will change the stereotypes in a further negative direction, at least for a short period of time, if the event takes place on the background of improving intergroup relations. Such predicted temporary effect is based on the evidence that short-term events have only limited influence on attitudes and affect, if they contradict strong dispositions or shift from the dominant trend of opinions and nature of intergroup relations (e.g. Bellisfield, 1972; Dillehay, 1964; Raviv, Sadeh, Raviv, Silberstein, & Diver, 2000; Thistlethwaite, 1974). These findings indicate that major events, especially traumatic ones as terrorist attacks, draw special attention and relevance. Terrorist attacks are very short, traumatic events, of negative nature, unambiguous and often in line with the held stereotypes of the terrorist group. The events provide powerful information, which automatically unfreeze held beliefs and attitudes, without its careful consideration and assessment. But, with time, as the stress and trauma wear off and the vividness of the major event declines, there is again broadening of the attention span to include different types of information and shifting back to pre-event beliefs and attitudes.

Another factor in the information processing of major events is the personal variables of the information processor, which determine how the person processes new information. Among personal variables, such as dogmatism, self-differentiation and self-monitoring, of special interest for the present study are the epistemic motivations proposed by Kruglanski and Webster (1996), which affect the initiation, continuation and cessation of information processing. They have important influence on the inferences made on the basis of information coming from the major events. These motivations are reflected in the extent to which individuals close on a belief, by trying to have knowledge, or avoid closure, in order to prevent a mistake. Features of specific or nonspecific closure must also be distinguished, since individuals may seek or avoid closure just on a specific belief or in general, on any one, that comes to mind. Much research has focused on the need for nonspecific closure (called *need for closure*), which may either occur as a stable personality disposition, or be aroused situationally, and facilitates reaching a conclusion. It indicates a desire to have firm knowledge, i.e. knowledge that prevents a feeling of uncertainty. Individuals with high need for closure tend to adhere to their held stereotypes(Crawford & Skowronski, 1998; Kruglanski & Freund, 1983; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). In general, they tend to hold more unidimensional stereotypes to avoid ambiguity and in times of major traumatic events, which provide information in line with the held stereotypes, they are expected to strengthen their extremism. The latter tendency reflects the increased need of closure in a situation of stress, in which individuals are highly motivated to have unequivocal knowledge (Bar-Tal, Raviv, & Spitzer, 1999).

The present investigation of the effect of a major event on stereotypic perceptions, attitudes and affect took place in Israel, which unfortunately serves as a natural laboratory to the study of intergroup conflict. The study concerned the effect of terrorist attacks carried out by Palestinian extremists, on Israelis’ stereotypes, social distance, feelings and attributed behavioral intentions toward Palestinians, Jordanians and Arabs. The historical background to the study is that of the peace process which began with the Oslo Agreement signed between the Israelis and the Palestinians on 13 September 1993, in Washington, and followed by the peace agreement Israel signed with Jordan on 26 October 1994.
peace process came to terminate the hostilities between the Israelis and the Palestinians, which
developed about the contested territory known over the last centuries as Palestine, which two
national movements, the Jewish (Zionism) and the Palestinian, claimed as their homeland. For many
years the Israeli–Arab conflict seemed irreconcilable and involved violent acts. But, since the late
1970s, with the signing of a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, a peace process slowly got underway
which has been the changing relations between Israeli and Arabs in the Middle East (Bar-Tal, 1998).
Presently, this peace process involves ongoing, direct negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian
representatives, which are opposed by various Israeli and Palestinian groups who occasionally resort to
violence.

In addition it should be noted that during the decades of violent conflict Israelis developed a very
negative stereotype of ‘the Arabs’ (Bar-Tal, 1996; Benyamini, 1981; Bizman & Amir, 1982; Hofman,
1972; Rouhana, 1987; Shamir & Sullivan, 1985), a label used as a general category, that failed to
differentiate various national Arab groups. Only with the beginning of the peace process in the 1970s did
such categorical and stereotypical differentiation begin. For example, a study by Benyamini (1981)
showed that in 1979, following the peace treaty with Egypt, ‘an Egyptian person’ was perceived
considerably more positively than ‘an Arab person’ or ‘a Syrian person’ or ‘an Arab person residing in
the occupied territories’ (i.e. a Palestinian). The last two persons were perceived the most negatively.
Recently, Bar-Tal and Teichman (in preparation) found that Israeli children as young as 10 years old now
differentiate among the groups. Between age 10 and 23 Palestinians, Syrians and Arabs are stereotyped
more negatively than Jordanians and Egyptians. Nevertheless, the Arab category has remained in use in
reference to Arabs in general.

In the present study, to investigate the effect of Palestinian terrorist attacks on Israeli stereotypes
and attitudes toward Palestinians, Jordanians and Arabs, the same questionnaires were administered
three times to the same respondents. The first assessment took place on 20 February 1996, about three
months after the murder of the Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, by an Israeli extremist, a point in
time when the peace process with the Palestinians seemed to be progressing well, with the last terrorist
attack having occurred on 21 August 1995, in Jerusalem. This was a relatively peaceful period, which
allowed to assessment of the stereotypic perceptions and attitudes as the baseline, in the general
context of the peace process. The second assessment took place on 26 February 1996, a day after two
terrorist attacks carried out by Palestinian members of the Hamas movement, an Islamic extremist
organization, which opposes the terms of the Israeli–Palestinian peace process. The first of these
attacks, which was carried out in Jerusalem, claimed 23 civilian lives and 55 wounded. The second,
which took place forty minutes later, in a southern town, Ashkelon, caused one death and 34 wounded.
Both attacks were widely reported in Israel by all the channels of mass communication and the
population responded with great emotional involvement, expressing a sense of vulnerability in the face
of unpredictable attacks which could overtake anyone everywhere. This major negative event was
repetitive, unambiguous, of great intensity and emotional involvement. Its inferred information, for the
vast majority of Israelis, was in line with their held negative stereotype concerning Palestinians.
However, it occurred in the midst of a peace process which involved Israeli–Palestinian negotiations. It
was, therefore, assumed that the effect of the attacks would be temporal only. A third assessment took
place on 26 May about 12 weeks after the occurrence of the last in another series of terrorist attacks
which shook Israel between 25 February and 4 March 1996. With the last assessment, the adolescent
respondents were also asked to fill out a questionnaire measuring need for closure, developed by
Webster and Kruglanski (1994).

The three target groups referred to by the study differed with regard to their relations to the terrorist
acts. Palestinians were directly related, since members of this national group performed the attack.
Jordanians were not related to the attack and in contrast to the Palestinians, who are generally
distrusted and disliked by Israelis, they are relatively perceived positively. The group ‘Arabs’, as
indicated, is the general category of all the Arab nations, which is still used in Israel, often in derogatory contexts.

Two age groups of adolescents participated in the study: 13–14 years old and 16–17 years old. The two age groups were selected in view of the evidence suggesting that in the early adolescent period, boys and girls tend to exaggerate differences between the ingroup and outgroups, tend to take more ethnocentric views, and tend to be more extreme and less complex in their judgments (Aboud, 1988). Indeed, a number of studies found that with age stereotypic perceptions and attitudes toward Arabs become more positive (Bar-Tal & Teichman, in preparation; Benyamini, 1981; Kaminsky & Bar-Tal, 1996).

The relations toward the three target groups were assessed with four measures: attributed stereotypic traits, reported social distance, experienced feelings, and attributed behavioral intentions. These four measures were selected in order to extend the assessment of the cognitive–affective basis for the relations towards the three target groups, in comparison to most of the research, which uses only one, or two, measures (mostly measures of stereotypes). They include cognitive measures of stereotypes, attitudes measured by social distance, reported affects which indicate feelings and emotions, and attributed intentions which indicate general expectations for peaceful relations with the group. These measures assess various cognitive–affective aspects of intergroup relations, which may react differently to the powerful information of terror attack. This assumption is based on the accumulated knowledge in social psychology which points out to the differential functioning of beliefs, attitudes, and emotions (e.g. Eagly & Chaiken, 1998; Ekman & Davidson, 1994).

The following hypotheses were tested in the study:

1. Israeli adolescents differentiate among the three target groups. They will perceive and evaluate Jordanians more positively than Palestinians and Arabs.
2. Following the terrorist attacks, the perception and evaluation of Palestinians and ‘Arabs’ will become more negative, but the evaluation of Jordanians will not change. With time, however, the perception and evaluation of Palestinians and Arabs will return to its baseline, as was assessed before the terrorist attacks.
3. Younger adolescents will perceive and evaluate the three target groups more negatively than older adolescents.
4. The need for closure will influence the perception and evaluation of the three groups. The higher the need for closure, the more negative will be the evaluation of the three target groups, especially of Palestinians, and especially following the terrorist attacks.

METHODS

Subjects

Participants totaled 119 adolescents, who filled out the questionnaire all three times. There were 66 8th graders aged 13–14 (31 males and 35 females) and 53 5th graders aged 16–17 (25 males and 28 females). Nevertheless, in different analyses the number of respondents differs, since not all of them filled out all the parts of the questionnaires. The adolescents participating in the study lived in a rural area in central Israel, went to the same school, and all came from middle-class families. They voluntarily participated in the study, which was approved by a human subjects review committee.
Questionnaires

The first questionnaire was designed to assess perceptions and evaluation of Palestinians, Jordanians and Arabs. It consisted of several parts. First, stereotypic perception toward each of the target groups was measured with 14 bipolar traits on a 5-point scale. The included traits were: clean–dirty, good–bad, smart–stupid, beautiful–ugly, industrious–lazy, strong–weak, sociable–unsociable, loyal–treacherous, educated–ignorant, hospitable–inhospitable, brave–coward, trustworthy–untrustworthy, tempered–violent, and merciful–cruel. They were taken from studies which investigated stereotypic perceptions of Palestinians, Jordanians or Arabs (Benyamini, 1981; Mahameed & Guttmann, 1983; Kaminsky & Bar-Tal, 1996). The social distance was measured with three questions regarding the willingness to engage in the following activities with a Palestinian (or Jordanian or Arab), ‘of the same age and gender as you, who speaks Hebrew’: to meet, to host in your house and to be a friend. Answers were either yes or no. In addition, the extent of eight affects toward the target group was measured on a 3-point scale (‘no’, ‘so-so’, ‘yes’). The following feelings and emotions were included: hatred, liking, disgust, pity, fear, anger, closeness, understanding. They all were taken from the studies by Mahameed and Guttmann (1983), and Kaminsky and Bar-Tal (1996). Finally, the subjects were asked to attribute intentions to the target group. With regard to Palestinians the question was: ‘Indicate how many Palestinians, in your opinion, want to live in peace with Israel’. The answers were given with five alternatives, ranging from (1) ‘all, 100%’, (2) ‘many, 75%’, (3) ‘half, 50%’, (4) ‘few, 25%’ and (5) ‘none, 0%’. Each subject was asked to fill out the same questionnaire about Palestinians, Jordanians and Arabs (altogether three questionnaires) three times. The order of the evaluation of the three target groups was counterbalanced.

The questionnaire to measure need for closure was constructed by Webster and Kruglanski (1994) and translated into Hebrew by Ejni-Brody (1993, unpublished thesis), who also validated it in Israel. This questionnaire consists of 42 items and the answers are given on a 6-point scale ranging from (1) ‘definitely do not agree’ to (6) ‘definitely agree’. (An example of an item is ‘I hate to change my plans in the last moment’.) Its Cronbach’s alpha in the present study was 0.77.

Dependent Variables

Seven dependent variables, which measure the relations towards the three target groups, were constructed on the basis of the first questionnaire. Three measures of stereotypic traits were obtained with the factor analyses of the 14 bipolar traits, which appeared in the questionnaire. Specifically, three factor analyses, with principal component method, were carried out for heuristic purposes on the first evaluations of the trait (i.e. first administration of the questionnaires) for each of the target groups. The results yielded very similar results, which constructed three factors. Social-evalative traits, which consist of clean, good, beautiful, sociable, loyal, hospitable, trustworthy, tempered, and merciful (Cronbach’s alphas were between 0.84 and 0.75). Potency traits, which consist of industrious, strong and brave (Cronbach’s alphas were between 0.81 and 0.69). Intellectual traits which consist of smart and educated (Cronbach’s alphas were between 0.75 and 0.65).

The variable social distance was constructed on the basis of the sum of responses to the three questions described previously. Two measures of affects were obtained with the factor analyses of the eight feelings and emotions which were listed in the questionnaire. Three factor analyses, with principal component method, were done on the first responses (i.e. first administration of the questionnaires), for each of the target groups. The results yielded identical results which led to the construction of two factors: negative feelings, which consist of hatred, disgust, fear and anger (Cronbach’s alphas were between 0.88 and 0.78); positive feelings, which consist of liking, pity, closeness and understanding (Cronbach’s alphas ranged between 0.89 and 0.82). The last, seventh
dependent variable was attributed intentions. It was based on the response to the question regarding subject’s estimation of what portion of the target group want to live in peace with Israel.

Procedure

The questionnaires were administered in the classrooms and the study was presented as an investigation of how children and adolescents perceive various nations. The first administration of the questionnaires, designed to measure the relations toward Palestinians, Jordanians, and Arabs, was performed on 20 February 1996, after a relatively long peaceful period for Israelis, which did not involve terrorist attacks by Palestinians. The second administration of the three questionnaires took place on 26 February 1996, one day after the two major terrorist attacks. The third administration took place on 25 May 1996, about three months after the terrorist attacks. In this last administration, the adolescents were also asked to fill out the need-for-closure questionnaire. Following this administration, subjects were debriefed and the rationale of the study was presented at length.

RESULTS

Preliminary analyses showed that there was no significant sex-related difference on the dependent variables, and therefore boys’ and girls’ data were combined. Then, seven univariate ANOVAs with a $2 \times (3 \times 3)$ design were carried out for each dependent variable, where the two Age Groups were between-subject factors, while the three Target Groups (Palestinians, Jordanians and Arabs) and the three Administrations were within-subject factors. The posteriori $t$-tests were performed with the Bonferroni method ($\alpha = 0.05$). The $F$ results are presented in Table 1 and the means and standard deviations of the dependent variables according to Timing and Target Group are presented in Table 2.

The analysis of the social-evaluative traits yielded main effect for Timing ($F(2, 160) = 7.07$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that the stereotype of these traits, for all the three target groups, was the most positive in the first administration, before the terrorist attacks ($M = 3.11$). In the second and third administration, the stereotype became equally more negative ($M = 3.00$ and 3.02 respectively). In addition, a main effect for Target Group was found ($F(2, 160) = 33.24$, $p < 0.01$). It shows that the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Social-evaluative traits</th>
<th>Potency traits</th>
<th>Intellectual traits</th>
<th>Social distance</th>
<th>Negative feelings</th>
<th>Positive feelings</th>
<th>Attribution of intention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between subjects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(A) Age</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>4.90*</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within subjects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(B) Timing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A × B</td>
<td>7.07**</td>
<td>9.88**</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>3.50*</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>10.35**</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C) Target group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A × C</td>
<td>33.24**</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>23.97**</td>
<td>22.72**</td>
<td>84.87**</td>
<td>11.00**</td>
<td>38.31**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B × C</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>3.28*</td>
<td>3.68*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A × B × C</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>4.22**</td>
<td>2.82*</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>5.01**</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>3.21**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.
Table 2. Means and standard deviations (in parentheses) of the dependent variables according to timing and target group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variables</th>
<th>Before the attacks</th>
<th>A day following the attacks</th>
<th>Three months after the attacks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Palestinians</td>
<td>Arabs</td>
<td>Jordanians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social-evaluative traits</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 82)</td>
<td>(0.58)</td>
<td>(0.57)</td>
<td>(0.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 82)</td>
<td>(0.67)</td>
<td>(0.72)</td>
<td>(0.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual traits</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 82)</td>
<td>(0.81)</td>
<td>(0.85)</td>
<td>(0.79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social distance</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>2.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 78)</td>
<td>(1.12)</td>
<td>(0.99)</td>
<td>(0.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative feelings</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 80)</td>
<td>(0.52)</td>
<td>(0.51)</td>
<td>(0.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive feelings</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>1.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 81)</td>
<td>(0.42)</td>
<td>(0.43)</td>
<td>(0.47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution of intention</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>3.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 80)</td>
<td>(0.79)</td>
<td>(1.86)</td>
<td>(0.60)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Palestinians ($M = 2.80$) were stereotyped with the social-evaluative traits more negatively than the Arabs ($M = 2.96$), who were stereotyped more negatively than the Jordanians ($M = 3.36$).

The analysis of the potency traits shows only a main effect for Timing ($F(2, 160) = 9.88, p < 0.01$). The stereotyping of the three groups was found to be most positive before the terrorist attacks ($M = 3.40$). Then, following the attacks, it became more negative ($M = 3.28$). But, two months later it became even more negative ($M = 3.17$). The analysis of the intellectual traits yielded one main effect: the Target Group effect ($F(2, 160) = 23.97, p < 0.01$) shows that the Palestinians ($M = 2.73$) were stereotyped more negatively than the Arabs ($M = 2.86$), who were stereotyped more negatively than the Jordanians ($M = 3.19$).

The analysis of social distance yielded main effect for Timing ($F(2, 152) = 3.50, p < 0.05$) showing that the subjects reduced their willingness for contact following the terrorist attacks and two months later it did not change ($M = 2.15$, $M = 2.01$, and $M = 1.98$, respectively). Also, a main effect for the Target Group ($F(2, 152) = 22.72, p < 0.01$) indicates that the subjects desired to have more contact with the Arabs ($M = 2.03$) than with the Palestinians ($M = 1.80$) and more contact with the Jordanians ($M = 2.29$) than with the Arabs.

The analysis of negative feelings shows a main effect for Age ($F(1, 78) = 4.90, p < 0.05$) indicating that the younger group ($M = 1.69$) expressed more negative feelings than the older group ($M = 1.51$). A main effect for Target Group ($F(2, 156) = 84.87, p < 0.01$) indicates that the subjects expressed more negative feelings toward Palestinians ($M = 1.91$) than toward Arabs ($M = 1.68$) and more negative feelings toward Arabs than toward Jordanians ($M = 1.30$). An interaction Timing by Target Group ($F(4, 312) = 4.22, p < 0.01$) shows that while the level of expressed negative feelings remained the same for Jordanians in the three measurements, for Palestinians, they became more negative following the attacks and two months later they became less negative. For Arabs, there was no difference in the first two measurements, but, in the third one, the level of negative feelings was reduced. A three-way interaction, Timing by Target Group by Age ($F(4, 312) = 5.01, p < 0.01$) shows that the younger group expressed a higher level of negative feelings toward Arabs and Palestinians than the older group. Also, while the former group reduced its negative feelings toward Arabs in the third measurement, the latter group did so for Palestinians. The analysis of positive feelings obtained few effects. The Timing effect ($F(2, 158) = 10.35, p < 0.01$) shows that in general more positive
feelings toward the three groups were expressed before the attacks ($M = 1.71$), than following the attacks ($M = 1.56$) or two months later ($M = 1.57$). A main effect for Target Group ($F(2, 158) = 11.00$, $p < 0.01$) shows that more positive feelings were expressed towards Jordanians ($M = 1.75$) than either towards Palestinians ($M = 1.52$) or towards Arabs ($M = 1.57$). An interaction between Timing and Target Group ($F(4, 316) = 2.82$, $p < 0.05$) shows that the positive feelings toward Palestinians were reduced following the attacks and remained so two months later ($M = 1.65, M = 1.41$ and $M = 1.49$). A similar picture emerged for Arabs ($M = 1.65, M = 1.50$ and $M = 1.55$). In contrast, the positive feelings toward Jordanians were found to be reduced in the third measurement only ($M = 1.84, M = 1.75$ and $M = 1.66$). An interaction Age by Target Group ($F(2, 158) = 3.28$, $p < 0.05$) shows that the two age groups differed with regard to their positive feelings towards Jordanians and Palestinians: While for the Jordanians, the older group expressed less positive feelings than the younger one ($M = 1.67$ and $M = 1.79$), for the Palestinians the opposite was found, the older group expressed more positive feelings than the younger ($M = 1.59$ and $1.48$).

The analysis of attributed intentions shows a main effect for Target Group ($F(2, 156) = 38.31$, $p < 0.01$) indicating that the attributions for the Palestinians ($M = 3.13$) and the Arabs ($M = 3.29$) were evaluated more negatively than those for the Jordanians ($M = 3.94$). An interaction Target Group by Age ($F(2, 156) = 3.68$, $p < 0.05$) shows that the older group made more positive attribution to the Palestinians and Arabs than the younger group. An interaction Target Group by Age by Timing ($F(4, 312) = 3.21$, $p < 0.01$) shows once again that the older adolescents were more affected by the attacks. They changed the attributions for Palestinians and Arabs in a negative direction following the attack, but two months later changed them positively. In contrast, the younger adolescents kept their lower attributions for each target group more or less stable during the investigated period.

In order to examine further the changes that took place for each target group, across the three assessments, trend analyses were performed for each dependent variable. The results of the analyses are presented in Table 3. They show, in the case of Palestinians, that four variables (social-evaluative traits, negative feelings, positive feelings and attribution of intentions) have a quadratic trend, indicating more negative perceptions and attitudes following terrorist attack, than either before the attacks or three months later (see Table 2). A similar trend was found in the case of Arabs for negative and positive feelings. The significant results of other analyses indicate a linear trend. That is, with an exception of attribution of intention for Arabs, the perceptions attitudes, and feelings became more negative following the terrorist attack and three months later they changed further, to be even more negative (see the means presented in Table 2).

Table 3. Results of trend analyses for each target group across the three assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Social-evaluative traits</th>
<th>Potency traits</th>
<th>Intellectual traits</th>
<th>Social distance</th>
<th>Negative feelings</th>
<th>Positive feelings</th>
<th>Attribution of intention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Palestinians</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>4.75*</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>5.73*</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>8.81**</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quadratic</td>
<td>8.34**</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>11.39**</td>
<td>24.99**</td>
<td>3.88*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>12.68**</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>4.98*</td>
<td>3.75*</td>
<td>4.45*</td>
<td>7.06**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quadratic</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>3.76*</td>
<td>4.96*</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordanians</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear</td>
<td>11.81**</td>
<td>16.15**</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>16.25**</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quadratic</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.
Table 4. Correlations between need for closure and dependent variables for each target group and for each measurement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Palestinians</th>
<th>Arabs</th>
<th>Jordanians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social-evaluative traits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before the attacks</td>
<td>−0.22 +</td>
<td>−0.16</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following the attacks (a day</td>
<td>−0.21*</td>
<td>−0.16</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>later)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After the attacks (3 months</td>
<td>−0.28*</td>
<td>−0.18</td>
<td>−0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>later)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potency traits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before the attacks</td>
<td>−0.14</td>
<td>−0.12</td>
<td>−0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following the attacks</td>
<td>−0.06</td>
<td>−0.05</td>
<td>−0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After the attacks</td>
<td>−0.18</td>
<td>−0.18</td>
<td>−0.25*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual traits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before the attacks</td>
<td>−0.10</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
<td>−0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following the attacks</td>
<td>−0.14</td>
<td>−0.10</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After the attacks</td>
<td>−0.29*</td>
<td>−0.15</td>
<td>−0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social distance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before the attacks</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following the attacks</td>
<td>−0.17†</td>
<td>−0.12</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After the attacks</td>
<td>−0.21*</td>
<td>−0.18</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative feelings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before the attacks</td>
<td>−0.18*</td>
<td>−0.10</td>
<td>−0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following the attacks</td>
<td>−0.25*</td>
<td>−0.18*</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After the attacks</td>
<td>−0.25*</td>
<td>−0.23*</td>
<td>−0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive feelings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before the attacks</td>
<td>−0.14</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following the attacks</td>
<td>−0.26*</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After the attacks</td>
<td>−0.12</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution of intention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before the attacks</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following the attacks</td>
<td>−0.17</td>
<td>−0.10</td>
<td>−0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After the attacks</td>
<td>−0.22*</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

†p < 0.10; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.

In an attempt to explore the relationship between the stereotypic perception and attitudes toward the three target group and the need for closure, a series of correlations were calculated between need for closure and each of the dependent variables, for each target group and for each of the three measurements. The results (see Table 4) show almost consistent lack of correlations when the calculations were done for Jordanians (all between 0.13 and 0.01, except one significant 0.25). For Arabs, the correlations were somewhat higher, ranging between 0.18 and 0.02, and two correlations reached significance.

For Palestinians, the picture changes again. The correlations are higher—many in the predicted direction, indicating that the higher the need for cognition the more negative are the stereotypic perceptions, the more likely we are to find social distance, negative feelings, less positive feelings, and more negative attributions. Nine correlations were found to be significant.

**DISCUSSION**

In general, the study’s first two hypotheses were confirmed to a large extent, the last two were only very partially validated. The first hypothesis, referring to the differentiation among the three target groups,
Palestinians, of which extremist members group carried out the terrorist attacks against Israeli Jews; Jordanians, with whom Israelis have peaceful relations and who were not involved in the attacks, and Arabs, who as an overriding category, refer to Arab of all nations, was confirmed across almost all the dependent variables, independently of age or timing. The adolescents held more positive stereotypes, attitudes and feelings toward Jordanians than toward either Palestinians or Arabs. The most negative stereotypic perceptions, attitudes and feelings were directed toward the Palestinians. Specifically, the Jordanians were perceived as having more positive social evaluative traits and intellectual traits, more willingness was expressed to engage in social contact with them, less negative and more positive feelings toward them were expressed and more positive attribution of intention was reported, than either toward Palestinians or Arabs. Also, the comparison between the Arabs and Palestinians shows that more positive social evaluative and intellectual traits were attributed to Arabs, more willingness for social contact with them was reported, and less negative feelings toward them were expressed.

These findings indicate that the Israeli adolescents differentially perceive and evaluate the three target groups, in correspondence with the differential relations Israelis have with them. They realize that the relations with the Palestinians are still conflictive; although the Oslo Agreement in 1993 began the process of conflict resolution with the Palestinians, it is still far from having reached a peaceful conclusion. The conflict still claims lives and both sides still resort to conflictual rhetoric. This explains the fact that the most negative perception and attitudes were manifested toward the Palestinians. For many years, the category ‘Palestinian’ has been an extremely threatening one, implying, for instance, recognition of the existence of a nation that claims Israeli land as its homeland. Israeli leaders avoided the use of this label and the delegitimization of Palestinians has been routine practice in Israel during the years of confrontation (Bar-Tal, 1988; Cohen, 1985; Domb, 1982; Firer, 1985). In contrast, the relations with the Jordanians have been different. Jordan was always presented as having common interests with Israel and even during times of conflict, there was ongoing, reported contact between the leaders of the two states (Klieman, 1981). Later, the formal peace treaty, signed in 1994, formalized the de facto peaceful relations, which had lasted over decades. In reflection of these relations, Jordanians were perceived most positively.

The label ‘Arabs’ has been the most frequently used category in Israel throughout the years. The undifferentiated use of this label has been an indicator of common hostility of the entire Arab world toward Israel through the decades of intractable conflict in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s. Therefore, the category ‘Arab’ was often used in a derogative sense label. Arabs, in general, were mostly perceived negatively, as violent, cruel, untrustworthy, primitive, dirty, etc. (e.g. Bar-Tal, 1996; Cohen, 1985; Mahaneed & Guttmann, 1983). Only with the formal termination of the conflict with the Egyptians in 1979 was the common Arab front against Israel cracked. Two decades later, Israel has differentiating relations with the Arab nations, ranging from unresolved violent conflict (e.g. the Lebanese and Syrians) to peaceful relations (e.g. the Egyptians, Jordanians). Nevertheless, the general negative category of Arabs is still in use. The results of this study reflect the complex nature of relations with Arab nations and the past conflictive history: Arabs were more positively perceived and evaluated than the Palestinians, but more negatively than the Jordanians.

The main thrust of the study was related to the effect of the terrorist attacks on the stereotypic perception and attitudes of the three target groups. Our second hypothesis touched on two processes: differentiation and changes. First, it predicted a differentiation of the reactions to the attacks, in terms of the three target groups: The attacks were expected to negatively affect the stereotypes and evaluations of the Palestinians, since it was performed by extremists of Palestinian nationality, but not the stereotypes and evaluations of Jordanians. The were also supposed to negatively affect perceptions of Arabs, since this general category includes Palestinians and is often used in reference to this particular group. In addition, our second hypothesis predicted a temporary negative effect of the
attacks, because of the continuation of the peace process with the Palestinians and habituation to terrorist attacks, which lead to feelings of threat and vulnerability, but with time, dissipates (see Hermann & Yuchtman-Yaar, 1999, ‘On the road to peace? The dynamics and political implication of Israeli–Jewish attitudes toward the Oslo process’, submitted).

The analyses of variance and trend analyses of the present study indicate that the timing of the assessment had a meaningful effect on the adolescents’ reactions toward the three target groups. In the majority of dependent variables (social evaluative and potency traits, social distance, and attribution of intention), main effects were found indicating that following terrorist attacks stereotypic perceptions and attitudes changed to be more negative toward all the three groups. Only with regard to negative and positive feelings, the adolescents differentiated among the three groups (target group by timing interactions). Participants did not change their negative and positive feelings toward Jordanians following the attack, but increased their negative feelings and decreased positive feelings toward Palestinians, and only decreased their positive feelings toward Arabs, following the attacks. These results indicate that the terrorist attacks had a major effect on the adolescents. Their cognitive-attitudinal reactions became more negatively oriented toward Jordanians, Palestinians, and Arabs, without differentiating among these three groups. The emotional variables showed differentiation, however. Our explanation for the differences between cognitive-attitudinal reactions and emotional reactions is based on recent theorizing by Bodenhausen (1993) and Smith (1993), which relates to cognition, emotion, and stereotyping. We assume that the terrorist attacks provided information, which elicited an affective state of threat and anxiety. It was in this affective state that adolescents gave their responses to questions regarding their stereotypic perceptions, attitudes, and feelings. According to Smith (1993), the respondents, as group members, first appraised the situation, attributing characteristics to the outgroups. This stereotyping was overwhelmingly influenced by reactions of threat and anxiety leading to a generalizing undifferentiating reaction toward all three Arab groups, since they simplified stereotypic perceptions (Bodenhausen, 1993). On the basis of the appraisal, appeared prejudiced emotions that were differentiated, highly specific and episodic (Smith, 1993). These prejudiced emotions were directed mostly toward Palestinians, who were considered to be responsible for the terrorist attacks.

The third assessment, taken two months after the terrorist attacks, showed differentiation of reactions, depending on the particular dependent variable. As predicted, attribution of intentions toward the three groups, as well as expressions of negative feelings toward the Palestinians, all returned to be more positive, as in the preattack period. But the stereotypic perceptions of social-evaluative, potency traits of the three groups, and social distance towards them, as well as negative feelings toward Arabs, and positive feelings toward Jordanians and Arabs, either did not change in the third assessment or became even more negative. To explain the results of the third measurement, it is necessary to consider the political situation in Israel at the time. The last assessment took place in a relatively peaceful period vis-à-vis Palestinians and Jordanians but in a very stormy period with regard to internal Israeli politics and violence at the Northern front with Lebanon. It was a period dominated by an election campaign in which two of the key issues were security and Palestinian intentions. The opposition party focused on the deficiencies in the Israeli–Palestinian Oslo Agreement and the negative intentions of the Palestinians. Also, during this period, the government initiated a violent confrontation with Lebanese guerrillas in southern Lebanon that led to a mistargeted bombardment of a United Nation military camp, which caused the killings of over 150 civilians. Following this widely publicized event, the Arab countries condemned the Israeli action in Lebanon, and some even threatened to avenge this act. It is possible that the complexity of the situation in the third assessment is reflected in the nonunitary responses. A willingness to have social contact and attributions of intentions toward the three groups and the expressions of negative feelings toward Palestinians became again more positive, returning to the level of the preattack period. Other measures either did
not change after the attacks in February (i.e. stereotypic perception of social-evaluative traits and positive feelings) or even changed for the worse (i.e. stereotypic perception of potency traits).

These results indicate that the attitudinal–emotional aspects of the relation toward other groups are the most reactive measures. Social distance reflecting attitude towards the target groups and feelings changed as a function of the events. Measures of stereotypic perceptions showed a differential effect. In essence, the contents of the stereotypes were related to the nature of the events. While the stereotypic perception of intellectual traits did not change through the measurement period, stereotypic perception of social-evaluative and potency traits became more negative following the terrorist attacks and the latter traits became even more negative during the election campaign, when verbal Arab threats appeared. The terrorist attacks had implications for such perceived traits as loyalty, goodness, trustworthiness, cruelty, violence, cowardice or strength and therefore the two categories of traits changed. It is possible that these traits were relevant to the events taking place during the period of the third assessment (condemnation of Israel by the Arab nations) and therefore they either continued to be evaluated negatively or changed for the worse. These results point to the complexity of measuring intergroup relations. By using various measures that assess different aspects of relations, it is possible to tap the reaction of group members toward outgroups more precisely.

The third hypothesis regarding age differences was only confirmed with regard to negative feelings. That is: younger adolescents expressed more negative feelings toward the three target groups than the older age group. Also, with regard to two measures, i.e. social distance and attribution of intentions, the older adolescents were seen to have been influenced by the events, increasing their negative responses following the attacks, whereas the younger adolescents did not change their reactions. These results show that the two groups did not differ significantly in their stereotypic perceptions, attitudes and feelings toward the three target groups. Adolescents aged 13–14 approach their full cognitive development and have complex, differentiating, and abstract cognitions (Flavell, 1985; Keating, 1980); their cognitive and emotional functioning is similar to the older group. Nevertheless, the study showed that the younger group was somewhat less sensitive to information derived from the attacks which indicated that Palestinian extremists carried out the attack. The older group tended to process this information and differentiated more among the three target groups, at least with regard to social distance, positive feelings and attribution.

Finally, the fourth hypothesis was only partially confirmed. Traces of the effect of need for closure, which reflects a desire for clear and unambiguous knowledge, which in turn leads to cognitive freezing (cessation of the generation of new alternative hypotheses), were found in the present study. The few significant results of correlations were in the predicted direction. In the case of several variables, adolescents with high need for closure tended to maintain more negative stereotypes and feelings, which provide a simple and unequivocal picture of the other group, especially of Palestinians. This result is not surprising in view of the fact that Palestinians are considered as the most threatening group for the Israelis among the three investigated groups. Threat, in turn, as a stressful experience increases the need for closure especially among those who possess this tendency. The partial significant results may be explained by a real-life powerful situation, which blurs individual differences. In the present study the background was powerfully stressful, in view of the murder of Israel’s Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a Jewish right-wing extremist, terrorist attacks and internal tensions. Such situations trigger a need for closure, which is also situationally aroused (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). It is possible that this macro situation had a homogenizing effect, thereby limiting the influence of personal tendency.

In sum, the main contribution of the present study is its demonstration that major events influence stereotypic perceptions, attitudes and feelings toward outgroups. The study is beyond the scope of the realistic conflict theory, which focuses on the general nature of intergroup relation as the major determinant of stereotypic perceptions and attitudes. It suggests that within the context of intergroup
relations major events may take place, and that individuals change their stereotypes and attitudes in accordance with the information they infer from these events. Major events differ with regard to a number of dimensions such as intensity, predictability, ambiguity, continuity, or contradiction to the nature of intergroup relations and held stereotypes. These variables determine the nature of inferred information, which, in turn, affects the stereotypes and attitudes, which, in essence, are cognitive schemas that may change. The literature has shown that very intense major events, such as wars or prolonged military disputes, unambiguously and lastingly affect stereotypes and attitudes (e.g. Dudycha, 1942; Sinha & Upadhyaya, 1960). The present study shows that major events of much less intensity and continuity also have an effect, albeit a temporal one. That is, with time, as the situation returns to normal, the stereotypes, attitudes and feelings tend to return to their usual level. These findings suggest that stereotypes and attitudes toward outgroups are more context-dependent than is thought by cognitive social psychologists. They change on the basis of information coming from events related to the intergroup relationship.

In this respect, the study provides additional reinforcement to the call to carry out relevant studies in real-life situations. Laboratory studies, with low relevant situations and materials, sometimes provide limited enlightments on the processes and outcomes of stereotyping. As the present study demonstrates, real-life situations are often relevant and involving, which, in turn, make them potent and complex. Also, the study points to the importance of knowledge about the political background of intergroup relations and the major events that are taking place in order to understand the stereotypes, contents and their changes.

The results in effect support the view that stereotypes are ‘fluid, variable and context-dependent’ as suggested by Oakes, Haslam, and Turner (1994, p. 211). But while Oakes, et al. (1994) presented this view, by focusing on ‘the relationship between self and others, the frame of reference, the dimensions of comparisons and the background knowledge, expectations, needs, values and goals of the perceiver’ (p.211), the present study sheds light on the importance of those intergroup events which are situational variables. This direction of research needs reinforcement in view of the heavy emphasis on individual-cognitive factors in stereotyping research. Situations within the intragroup as well as intergroup context constitute a determining factor in the formation and change of group members’ stereotypes. Social psychological research has to study these factors too.

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REFERENCES


