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# **SOCIAL JUDGMENTS IN ISRAELI AND ARAB CHILDREN**

## *Findings From Media-Based Intervention Projects*

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Sesame Workshop (formerly Children's Television Workshop), the internationally respected pioneer in children's educational TV programming, developed a new program initiative in the late 1990s, *Rehov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim*. A co-production of Israeli and Palestinian children's media providers, the TV/community-outreach program was designed to help 4- to 7-year-old children in Israel and the West Bank learn about and appreciate the traditions and values of their cultures, as well as the cultures of their neighbors. In this regard, the program's central themes included teaching understanding and mutual respect. It presented bilingual episodes, including cross-over segments in which characters from *Shara'a Simsim* (the Palestinian street) visited with characters on *Rehov Sumsum* (the Israeli street) and vice versa. This highlighted the religious and ethnic traditions of each respective society, illustrating such core themes as acceptance, friendship, and the appreciation of similarities and differences. Sesame Workshop also developed another new program initiative in 2003, *Sesame Stories*. This program was a co-production of Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian children's media providers and shared the same target audience of 4- to 7-year-

old children, although this time not only in Israel and the West Bank, but also in Jordan. These separate but parallel TV series present animated versions of children's stories drawn from the religious and ethnic traditions of each respective society, illustrating the core themes as acceptance, friendship, and appreciation of similarities and differences.

In this chapter, we describe the design and implementation of these projects developed to assess children's attitudes toward themselves and others, with particular attention to engendering an understanding of and respect for all of the cultural groups represented in the target audience. In addition, we provide a developmentally informed model for evaluating the effectiveness of exposure to these shows for children's social and moral development. We explain how areas of research on children's stereotypes, moral judgments, intergroup attitudes, and intervention programs, designed to reduce prejudice and intergroup tension, were utilized to inform the creation of these developmentally informed assessment studies.

Overall, the goals of our approach are to assist media-based interventions by providing evaluations of the effectiveness of the shows on children's social and moral judgments, and to enhance the current literature in the fields of stereotyping, moral development, and media intervention. The focus of the evaluations was on the positive influences of *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim* and *Sesame Stories*, two media interventions that were being aired for the first time, on children's social development.

## BACKGROUND

### Stereotyping

In general, research on children's *stereotypes* (defined as attributing a trait to an individual based on their group membership; see Killen & Stangor, 2001) and *prejudiced judgments* (defined as responding to others in a negative manner based on their group membership; see Aboud & Levy, 2000) has concentrated on gender and race. Developmentalists have found, for example, that gender and racial stereotypes emerge during the preschool period (Aboud, 1992; Bigler & Liben, 1993). Racial prejudice, as measured by the attribution of negative traits to African American children, lessens after middle childhood (Aboud, 1992). Gender stereotypes decline during middle childhood and reemerge during adolescence (Ruble & Martin, 1998).

To date, research on children's cultural stereotypes, however, is lacking (for exceptions, see Cairns, 1989; Hoffman & Bizman, 1996; Ladd & Cairns, 1996), yet Bar-Tal and his colleagues (Bar-Tal, 1996, 1997; Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005) have worked to fill this gap in the literature. They have

demonstrated that Israeli-Jewish children acquire negative attitudes and stereotypes about adult Arabs by the age of 9 to 10 years (see Bar-Tal, Teichman, & Yahel, 1994). Results of interviews with preschool-age children have been mixed; although children might have difficulties answering questions such as "Describe an Arab," negative attitudes and stereotypes toward Arabs still manifest in the responses to other questions. For instance, they are more likely to rate Arabs as bad, ugly, or unfriendly and less likely to say that they would play with an Arab child or sit near them when answering forced-choice questions. This negative tendency only strengthens with age (see Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). Still this research focuses only on the stereotypes that Israeli-Jewish children hold about adult Arabs. The study presented here examines not only Israeli-Jewish children's stereotypes about Arab children, but also Palestinian and Israeli-Palestinian children's stereotypes about Israeli-Jewish children. It addresses the nature of stereotyping in young children, in general, and in regard to child members of the other group, as well as how stereotyping changes due to media intervention such as *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim*.

Stereotyping in nonviolent contexts can lead to negative beliefs about the self, as well as prejudice and discrimination of members of the out-group. For example, this may be seen in terms of exclusion of members of the out-group or denial of resources to members of the out-group. The consequences of stereotyping in the context of violent, intractable conflicts may be even more extreme and lead to further violent interactions between conflicting groups. This occurs through extreme negative stereotyping, which facilitates dehumanization and delegitimization of the other group as a form of moral exclusion that serves as an excuse to continue the inter-group violence (see Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). Thus, it is essential to intervene and debunk the stereotypes to prevent such negative outcomes. This is a daunting task because stereotypes are hard to change, especially in adulthood, and therefore the time to intervene is early on in childhood (Macrae, Stangor, & Hewstone, 1996). Children must have access to information that represents their own group as well as other groups in non-stereotyped manners.

### Media Intervention

TV serves as a source of information about the social world to children. As Bar-Tal and Teichman (2005) report, 87% of preschool-age, Israeli-Jewish children report learning about Arabs through TV programming. Although TV may serve as a source of stereotypic information, high-quality programming can also work to combat such stereotypic information (see Graves, 1999). Educational TV, such as *Sesame Street*, not only promotes cognitive

skill acquisition and development, but also promotes moral development and prosocial behaviors, including stereotype reduction (see Fisch, 2004). Positive results have been found in terms of stereotype reduction (Common Ground Productions, Search for Common Ground in Macedonia, & Sesame Workshop, 2000; Graves, 1999; see Fisch, 2004), prosocial effects of *Sesame Street* (Paulson, 1974; Zielinska & Chambers, 1995), and promotion of social tolerance (Lovelace, Scheiner, Dollberg, Segui, & Black, 1994; Tidhar & Schacter, 1986). For example, Graves (1999) reports that viewing a cartoon comprised of multi-ethnic characters led to positive changes in the attitudes of African American children. These changes were represented by: (a) higher levels of identification with same-race messages; (b) recognition of positive emotions of a same-race character, and (c) recall of activities of the character along with cultural features of the character's environment (LaRose & Eisenstock, 1981). Moreover, European American preschoolers, after 2 years of viewing *Sesame Street*, report more positive attitudes toward African Americans and Latino Americans (Bogatz & Ball, 1971).

Similar effects are seen with Macedonian, Albanian, Roma, and Turkish children, who all showed increases in positive attitudes toward members of their own and the other group(s) after viewing *Nashe Maalo* (Our Neighborhood), a children's TV program that represented children from each of the four ethnicities in an effort to promote mutual respect and understanding. Other positive effects of viewing *Nashe Maalo* included higher ratings of self-perception, higher percentages of correctly identifying the other ethnic languages, and higher percentages of willingness to invite children from another ethnic group into their home (Common Ground Productions, Search for Common Ground in Macedonia, & Sesame Workshop, 2000). These findings are all the more impressive given the high level of conflict between these groups and, further, lead us to hypothesize that the current intervention, *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim*, would result in increases in identification of cultural symbols, increases in prosocial reasoning in regard to the peer social conflict scenarios, and decreases in stereotyping in viewers.

The fact that the *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim* episodes and the evaluative scenarios utilized in this study involve peer situations also supports our hypotheses, in that central aspects of change and development, such as perspective taking, moral reciprocity, and empathy, are facilitated when one feels one can relate to these with someone like oneself (see Nucci, 2006). Keeping that in mind, we propose that *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim* is likely to be an effective means of moral education, as it has been for other forms of education, given that the show is peer oriented. *Sesame Street* programming is an effective media intervention, in general, due to the fact that it allows children to identify with the characters by age, gender, and ethnicity, and offers familiar, child-relevant content, such as dealing with situations

they would face in their everyday lives (Fisch & Truglio, 2001), as well as in this particular situation, because it is informed by developmental psychology and intergroup relations. In *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim*, exchanges and interactions between peers and equals (e.g., muppets and children) serve to provide key information about moral exchanges.

## Moral Development

While research has shown that young children hold stereotypes about other groups and demonstrate prejudiced judgments, studies have also shown that children as young as 3 years of age understand certain basic principles of how to treat others (Killen, 1991, 1995; Killen & Smetana, 1999; Smetana, 1995; Tisak, 1995; Turiel, 1983, 1998). Recent work in developmental social cognition has provided a framework, referred to as a *social-cognitive domain model* (see Smetana, 1995, 2006; Turiel, 1983, 1998, 2006), for investigating different forms of social reasoning. Within this model, social reasoning is categorized into three different domains of knowledge: moral (fairness, equality, rights), social conventional (customs, traditions, authority), and psychological (personal choice, autonomy). Judgments in the moral domain focus on the intrinsic consequences of an action that defines a transgression as wrong, and wrong wherever it may occur; that is, the principle underlying the act is generalizable across all contexts for all people (for reviews, see Smetana, 1995, 2006; Tisak, 1995; Turiel, 1998; Turiel, Killen, & Helwig, 1987). From the age of 3 years, children from a number of cultures have been found to differentiate between social and moral events, especially those that are everyday and familiar to them (see Smetana, 2006).

This theory of moral reasoning has recently been applied to the context of intergroup relationships (see Killen, Pisacane, Lee-Kim, & Ardila-Rey, 2001; Killen & Stangor, 2001). Intergroup relationships involve those relationships that reflect ingroup and outgroup dynamics (see Brown & Gaertner, 2001). For example, social-psychological research on intergroup relationships includes group categories of gender, race, ethnicity, and culture. Developmental research by Killen and colleagues has shown that children and adolescents evaluate exclusion from social groups, such as gender and ethnicity, as wrong using moral reasons and, in some contexts, as legitimate using social-conventional and psychological reasons (see Killen, Margie, & Sinno, 2006). Further, in contexts in which exclusion is straightforward and based solely on group membership, such as gender or ethnicity, children judge this to be wrong. In more complex and ambiguous scenarios, however, children invoke the use of conventions such as group functioning and stereotyping when justifying their judgments. The methodologies utilized in our media intervention project in the Middle East were derived, in part, from this integrative approach to intergroup attitudes.

Thus, these different bodies of research, stereotyping, media intervention, and moral development guided the development of our current evaluative instrument and served as the backdrop for the media-based intervention project that we conducted in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. This research provides a framework for developing interventions to reduce prejudice and stereotyping that focuses on stereotypes, social cognition, moral judgments, and peer relationships.

### THE RECHOV SUMSUM/SHARA'A SIMSIM PROJECT

Sesame Workshop promotes positive values, such as respect for others, the importance of sharing, and equality and reciprocity. As a pioneering examination of the influence of viewing *Sesame Street* in the Middle East, a study was conducted with a special version of *Sesame Street* entitled, *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim*, created in 1998. It included children from Israel and the Palestinian Territories. Sesame Workshop designed the *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim* series to promote respect and understanding among children in the Middle East, specifically Israeli and Palestinian children. We evaluated this series in terms of its impact on children's cultural knowledge, stereotypes, and social conflict resolution. We formulated the following four research questions:

1. Do Israeli and Palestinian children have cultural stereotypes about each other? If so, does viewing *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim* have a positive impact on Israeli and Palestinian children's use of stereotypes?
2. Does viewing *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim* have a positive impact on Israeli and Palestinian children's knowledge and appreciation of the everyday lives of people from their own culture as well as those from each other's cultures?
3. Does viewing *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim* have a positive impact on how Israeli and Palestinian children solve social conflict situations involving children from each other's cultures?
4. Does viewing *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim* increase Israeli and Palestinian children's knowledge of their own culture as well as those of each other's? How does the knowledge of characters representing the child's own culture compare with the knowledge of characters representing the other culture?

Based on the literature, we had several general expectations. First, we predicted that Israeli and Palestinian children would have negative judg-

ments about members of the other culture, which would be revealed in their negative stereotyped knowledge. Second, we expected that children in the Middle East would bring moral judgments to bear on their evaluation of peer conflict situations based on prior studies that have shown moral judgments, such as fairness, are found in young children's judgments in a wide range of cultures (see Smetana, 1995; Tisak, 1995, for reviews). Third, we predicted that viewing the TV show, *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim*, would positively influence children's judgments about peer conflict situations and would reveal an increase in knowledge about one's own culture and the culture of the other.

### Instrument Development

The Core U.S. Investigators in consultation with representatives from Sesame Workshop developed an assessment instrument for use in this evaluation. The pretest instrument included four sections. The first evaluated children's stereotypes of members of the other group (e.g., Israeli-Jewish children were asked about Arabs, and Arab children were asked about their knowledge of Jews). The second section asked questions regarding understanding of the cultural similarities between the two groups. The third section presented vignettes involving dilemmas about conflict resolution that assessed children's social judgments. Children were given both forced-choice questions and open-response justifications for these responses. The instrument used pictures and cartoon drawings illustrating the vignettes that are described in more detail later. The fourth section examined children's knowledge of cultural symbols. In the posttest assessment, a fifth section assessed children's knowledge of the *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim* characters.

### Conflict-Resolution Vignettes

In the present study, we used peer conflict situations to assess children's judgments about members of the other culture. Peer conflict situations have been used to study children's moral judgments because it has been shown that children make different judgments in the contrasting contexts of peer and adult-child exchanges. Beginning with classic studies by Piaget (1932), research has shown that peer interaction facilitates children's development of concepts of justice and fairness (Killen, 1991; Ross & Conant, 1992; Smetana, 1995; Turiel, 1983) and friendship (see Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). Investigations over the past several decades have revealed that, through interactions with peers, children develop skills involving cooperation, negotiation, and perspective-taking, all essential building blocks for

constructing concepts of justice and fairness. Children communicate with peers and engage in reciprocal exchanges with peers in ways that are different from their interactions with adults.

Following the social domain theory research tradition (see Killen & Smetana, 1999; Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 2006), vignettes were utilized in the instrument that involved everyday scenarios with Jewish and Palestinian peers regarding turn-taking on the swings, sharing toys (cars or dolls), and playing a game of hide-and-seek. These themes of intergroup relations and exclusion function as a source of everyday social conflicts in childhood. The vignettes depicted scenarios targeting the related goals of respect and understanding—those highlighted in the *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim* episodes. An interviewer presented each vignette to the child being interviewed using both a series of cartoon drawings and verbal descriptions of the initial action, as well as the two possible resolutions of the story. For each vignette, the children made a judgment (e.g., selecting one of the two possible resolutions) and then justified their answer, a methodology adapted from standard protocols used in the social and moral development literature (see Killen, Lee-Kim, & McGlothlin, 2002; Smetana, 1995, 2006; Turiel, 1983, 2006). This enabled a clear analysis of the generalizability of the positive effects of viewing the *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim* episodes in terms of the children's ability to extrapolate the series' core themes of acceptance and mutual respect to novel settings involving moral reasoning to include or exclude others.

Conceptually based justification categories were developed using a standard protocol, which encompassed personal (e.g., "personal choice," "selfish motives"), social conventional (e.g., "cultural stereotypes," "group functioning"), and moral (e.g., "fairness," "prosocial") justifications. These systems were developed based on a sampling of the children's open-ended justification responses (moral reasoning) across all sites and were derived from the social-cognitive domain model and previous research using related categories (see Killen et al., 2002; Smetana & Asquith, 1994; Turiel, 1983, 1998).

The final instrument was sent to each of the Principal Investigators in the Middle East, where it was translated into either Arabic or Hebrew and then back-translated into English. Separate versions for boys and girls were developed. As well, specific *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim* characters and specific languages were utilized for each site. As mentioned earlier, measuring young children's social and moral understanding using interview methodologies involving assessments of vignettes reflects a well-established methodology that has been substantiated in numerous studies with children around the world (for a review, see Killen, McGlothlin, & Lee-Kim, 2002: Brazil, China, Colombia, India, Germany, Japan, Korea, Israel, Nigeria, Taiwan, United Kingdom, United States).



## METHODOLOGY

This study took place in three sites. Two of the sites were in Israel: One population was Israeli-Jewish children (Tel Aviv), and a second population was Israeli-Palestinian children (Acre). The third site was in the West Bank (Ramallah) with the population of Palestinian children. Teachers and other contacts at local preschools were used to recruit the children.

The participants were children from these three sites between the ages of 4 and 6 years. There were 275 children who participated in this study (99 Palestinian, 113 Israeli-Jewish, 63 Israeli-Palestinian). All three groups contained a rough balance of girls and boys.

Prior to the start of the broadcast in April 1998, the children were interviewed individually in their home language by interviewers who were members of the same cultural group. Four months following the initial pretest interview and the start of the broadcast, the posttest was administered in the same manner. Although there was no controlled viewing of the episodes, the character-recognition section of the posttest and an independent study commissioned by the Children's Television Workshop to measure the viewership of the series (Cohen & Francis, 1999) were utilized to account for viewing among the participants.

## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

*Stereotypes of Other.* When asked to describe a Jew or an Arab (the other group), all three of the groups of preschoolers held stereotypic beliefs about the other group at both testing times. For instance, negative attributes given about Jews included "beats us up" and "kills my people," whereas negative attributes about Arabs included "throw us out of our land" and "dirty." Following the viewing of *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim*, the Israeli-Jewish and Israeli-Palestinian children significantly<sup>1</sup> increased their positive views of members of the other culture, and the Israeli-Jewish children significantly decreased their negative views of members of the other culture.

*Knowledge of Cultural Similarities.* To assess the children's knowledge of cultural similarities between Israeli-Jews and Arabs, the participants were asked to decide whether an Arab child, a Jewish child, or both do a series of everyday activities (e.g., Who speaks Hebrew? Who eats falafel? Who would help you if you fell down?) or hold certain occupations (e.g., Who has a mother or father that could be a grocer? Who has a mother or father that

could be a teacher?). At the time of the pretest, both the Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish groups predominantly selected the option representing a person from the cultural group to which they belong, whereas, the Israeli-Palestinian group chose both the Arab option and the both option, reflecting their existence in both cultures. An increase in the knowledge of cultural similarities was seen on the posttest assessment with the Israeli-Jewish children in terms of an increase in nominating both members of their own and the other culture for everyday activities.

**Social Reasoning.** The judgment and justification responses to the conflict-resolution vignettes described earlier were evaluated to assess the children's social reasoning about intergroup conflicts. Israeli-Jewish, Palestinian, and Israeli-Palestinian children all chose the prosocial judgment alternative for the Swings and Car-Dolls scenarios. Further, for the Hide-and-Seek scenario, the Israeli-Jewish children selected the prosocial alternative as well, and the Israeli-Palestinian children selected both options equally. All three groups utilized various justifications at the pretest, including those that involved selfish motivations, rules, and fairness considerations. However, all three groups of children increasingly continued to use prosocial reasoning, such as sharing toys or taking turns on the swings, when resolving the peer conflict scenarios. Additionally, the Palestinian children increased their usage of the friendship justification after viewing the shows.

**Knowledge of Cultural Symbols.** A series of picture cards depicting various Jewish (e.g., Star of David, Menorah) and Arab cultural symbols (Palestinian flag, Dome of the Rock) were shown to the children to determine the depth of their knowledge about both sets of symbols. Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish children more accurately identified symbols from their own cultural group. Israeli-Palestinian children, however, accurately identified both Jewish and Arab cultural symbols, again reflecting their existence among both cultures. The children generally increased their knowledge of cultural symbols.

**Overview of Results.** Although the three groups, at times, had differential responses to the intervention, these differences among the three groups can possibly be accounted for by the variability in the two programs and the different environmental conditions in which the children live. For example, the Palestinian production contained less Hebrew than the Israeli production contained Arabic, and the show schedules varied. Additionally, the Palestinian children live in areas that are more directly affected by the negative intergroup conflict, whereas, the Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish children live in areas where this is less the case and, at the same time, there is more opportunity for exposure to the other cultural group.

Differential effects aside, for all three groups, a number of positive social reasoning outcomes arose from viewing the *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim* series. The findings from this project were threefold: (a) the interview methodology provided a way to assess the effectiveness of the media intervention on young children's social and moral understanding, (b) the interview methodology also revealed information about young children's interpretations of their enjoyment and understanding of the content of the show, and (c) the interview provided basic developmental information regarding what young children in the Middle East think about "the other," whether their stereotypes are applied to their evaluations of intergroup peer interactions, and how they resolve conflicts that involve children from other cultural backgrounds (particularly those from groups in which there exist societal conflict and tension). The media intervention was deemed quite effective based on our interview methodology.

## THE SESAME STORIES PROJECT

The *Sesame Stories* project was developed after *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim* began its broadcast. Produced with the continued educational objective of promoting respect and understanding, the *Sesame Stories* project included Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian co-production partners and consisted of three distinct, but related, productions, each designed to address the cultural specificity of its target audience: Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian. A number of factors led to the creation of the *Sesame Stories* initiative: (a) the fact that only the *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim* study had examined the influence of viewing *Sesame Street* with these populations (see Cole et al., 2003), (b) the results of the *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim* project were positive and deemed successful, and (c) there had been an increase in the violent nature of the conflict since the intervention was first aired. Sesame Workshop sought to expand on the previous study, as well as determine the effectiveness of such a media intervention in a time of heightened conflict, specifically assessing the ongoing impact of program viewing on children's attitudes toward themselves and their neighbors, with particular attention to the program's capacity to engender understanding of and respect for all of the cultural groups represented in the target audience. The *Sesame Stories* evaluation highlighted four animated stories embedded in the program that included additional studio material featuring Muppet characters, live-action segments, and other short animated items. Each of the four stories focused on the themes of recognizing common ground and similarities, acceptance of others, sharing, and friendship. Thus, *Sesame Stories* productions premiered on Israeli, Jordanian, and Palestinian TV in 2003 to help 4- to 7-year-

old children in these areas learn about and appreciate the traditions and values of their cultures, as well as the cultures of their neighbors.

The evaluation project extended the prior study in multiple ways. First, the project evaluated children's exposure to *Sesame Stories*, a new production from Sesame Workshop. Second, this project targeted children from four regions, including the West Bank and Jordan. The study, therefore, adds to this literature by examining Palestinian, Israeli-Palestinian, Israeli-Jewish, and Jordanian preschoolers' stereotypes about the other group. This added yet another dimension to the Arab group, allowing for an even more detailed analysis of any differences and similarities among the stereotypes in these various groups of Arab children. Third, children's exposure to the show was systematically examined by using a controlled viewing design, in which a group of children watches the show in their classroom while other children are not exposed to repeated viewings of the show in their classroom. Finally, the project involved more comprehensive measurements of children's understanding of the characters, as well as story comprehension, social goals, moral concepts, and conflict-resolution judgments. This *Sesame Stories* study, therefore, continued to advance this line of research in quite relevant and important ways.

## INSTRUMENT DEVELOPMENT

In the same manner as that utilized with the *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim* evaluation, the Core U.S. Investigators, in consultation with representatives from Sesame Workshop, developed an assessment instrument for use in this evaluation. The instrument included four sections. The first evaluated children's basic knowledge of the *Sesame Stories* programs, including character identification. The second section asked specific questions regarding children's comprehension of the four stories that were targeted in the evaluation. Children were asked to describe the events of the story and how the conflict or situation resolved. The third section asked children questions about their views of the "other" (e.g., Israeli-Jewish children were asked about Arabs, and Arab children were asked about their knowledge of Jews). The fourth section presented vignettes involving dilemmas about sharing, conflict resolution, and stereotyping, which are described in more detail next.

### Specific Vignettes

Similar to the vignettes utilized in the *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim* study, those used in this instrument involved everyday scenarios with peers;

however, these vignettes focused on issues of exclusion (based on body size, gender, and cultural membership), inclusion (regarding shared knowledge, societal conventions, and language barriers), stereotypes, and resource sharing. There were eight vignettes in total. The first vignette, entitled, "Small," involved a group of children who had to decide whether to let another child who was the same age, but small and little, play with them. In the "Sport" vignette, a group of children of the same gender was playing a sports game, and they had to decide whether to let a child of the other gender play with them. "Balloons in the Park" told of a child who found four balloons in the park and whether she or he should share the balloons with three other children who wanted to play with them as well. In "Different Country," a group of good friends had to decide whether they should play with a child from a different country. The vignette entitled "Games" detailed a group of one gender who loved to play a game in the park and whether they should allow a member of the opposite gender join them even though this child did not know how to play the game. The next vignette, "Party Hats," dealt with a group of friends who planned a party to which everyone had to wear the same party hat and whether they should let another child come to the party even though the child came from another country where they only wore a different type of party hat. The "Kite Flying" vignette involved a child who lost control of his or her kite and saw it broken in the hands of another child who was rumored to be very bad. The first child had to decide how the kite broke and what to do next. Last, the "Ice Cream" vignette featured a group of children who all spoke the same language and whether they should first stop and help another child who spoke a different language and had fallen while he was running to the ice cream truck or if they should get their ice cream and then help the child.

In addition to reflecting the content in *Sesame Stories*, these themes reflected various sources of social conflicts in childhood. Several of these vignettes drew directly on the themes and subject matters presented in the *Sesame Stories* episodes viewed by the participants. Other vignettes depicted scenarios targeting related goals of respect and understanding. Both verbal descriptions and cartoon picture cards were presented to the children to describe the scenarios. For each vignette, the children made a judgment (e.g., "Should the group include or not include the child?") and then justified their answer (e.g., "Why is it OK or not OK to exclude?"), again enabling a clear analysis of the generalizability of the positive effects of viewing the *Sesame Stories* episodes in terms of the children's ability to extrapolate the series' core themes of acceptance and mutual respect to novel settings involving moral reasoning to include or exclude others. Conceptually based justification categories for these responses were developed in the same manner as that reported for the *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim* study (see Cole et al., 2003).

## METHODOLOGY

Assessments were collected across four sites for this study. The Israeli-Jewish population site (Petach Tikvah and Herzliyah) and the Israeli-Palestinian population site (Nazareth, Kufur, Qari, and Baka Elgarbia) were both in Israel. A third site was located in Ramallah (the Palestinian population), and a fourth site was located in Amman (the Jordanian population).

Children between 4 and 7 years of age from local preschools participated in this study; 433 children participated in the pretest phase and 429 children participated in the posttest phase. In the pretest phase, 102 Israeli-Jewish children participated, and in the posttest phase, 97 of the children from the original 102 participated. For the Israeli-Palestinian sample, 119 and 120 children participated in the pre- and posttest phases, respectively. One hundred Palestinian children and 112 Jordanian children participated in both the pre- and posttest phases. All four samples were roughly balanced in terms of gender and group (control vs. experimental).

All children were assessed with the evaluation instrument prior to and after the controlled viewing. These assessments took place in one-on-one interviews conducted in their home language by interviewers who were members of their same cultural group. Half of the children at each site were assigned to the controlled viewing condition, whereas the other half served as a control group. Those children assigned to the controlled viewing group watched the program in their respective preschools three times a week over a period of 8 weeks—for 24 exposures.

## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Overall findings indicate that children across all four sites had a positive response to viewing selected *Sesame Stories* programs regularly over a period of several weeks. Assessments following the structured viewing period indicated that children enjoyed the shows and liked the characters. The stories were found to be age appropriate for the viewers as reflected in high comprehension scores. Children were readily able to identify characters from the shows. Furthermore, our results reveal that children understood the moral themes embedded in the stories. When presented with moral reasoning problems (e.g., exclusion from the group based on gender or cultural membership) after exposure to *Sesame Stories*, a majority of children responded with positive or inclusive moral explanations. Closer examination of the data from each of four sites showed that, although, in general,

children had a positive response to exposure to *Sesame Stories*, different patterns of results were found per site. Findings specific to each cultural group are described in detail next.

**Israeli-Jewish.** Analysis of Israeli-Jewish children's evaluations of moral vignettes showed that, in general, recognition of the wrongfulness of exclusion was high in both the pre- and posttest levels of children who watched the show. For each of the eight vignettes presented, children's judgments (e.g., "Is it OK or not OK for exclusion to happen?") at both pre- and posttest levels were consistent and positive. Differences emerged, however, in the reasoning (justifications for why it is OK or not OK) that children used to explain their judgments. In particular, Israeli-Jewish children's reasoning about inclusion in the "Games" context (vignette involving inclusion based on gender) and moral reasoning about prosocial behavior in the "Kite Flying" context (vignette involving stereotypes of others) increased among children who watched the show, whereas change did not occur for children in the control group. As an example, children who viewed the shows were more likely to increase their use of reasoning such as "Because he doesn't know what is 'jumping on rope' and he is their age. They can teach him. It is not right because their decision is no good. They should include him" (female, age 6.05 years) to the "Games" vignette at posttest assessment. Notable changes were not found for the other six vignettes, however. This was due, in part, to the high pretest responses on the moral judgment assessments. Overall, findings demonstrate that Israeli-Jewish children generally understood the wrongfulness of exclusion and gave appropriate moral reasons, such as appeals to inclusion of others to ensure equal access and prosocial behavior of the majority to the minority for why exclusion is wrong.

**Israeli-Palestinian.** Analysis of Israeli-Palestinian children's evaluations of moral vignettes indicated that, in general, positive judgments and prosocial reasoning increased after viewing the show. For five out of the eight vignettes presented, Israeli-Palestinian children's judgments (e.g., "Is it OK or not OK for exclusion to happen?") increased among children who were exposed to the show, whereas change did not occur for children who did not view the show. In particular, increases in positive judgments were found for vignettes involving inclusion or exclusion based on differences, such as physical attributes ("Small") or stereotypes (e.g., "Games," "Sport," "Different Country"). As an example, children's judgments supporting inclusion of a child of the opposite gender in the "Sport" vignette increased after viewing the show. Similar positive results were found when examining the types of reasoning (justifications for why it is OK or not OK) used by Israeli-Palestinian children to support their judgments of inclusion and exclusion. In particular, for the "Balloons in the Park" (vignette involving

sharing resources) and "Ice Cream" (vignette involving inclusion based on language barriers) vignettes, prosocial reasoning (e.g., friendship) increased among children who viewed the show, whereas change did not occur for children in the nonviewing group. As an example, one boy, age 5.75 years, said regarding the "Ice Cream" vignette, "So that they can now become friends, and will then decide to play with each other", while another boy, age 5.62 years, said about the "Balloons in the Park" vignette, "Cooperation among friends is really nice." Overall, Israeli-Palestinian children who viewed the show had positive responses to *Sesame Stories* and were found to have increases in prosocial judgments and justifications when evaluating situations of peer conflict with regard to exclusion, inclusion, stereotypes, and sharing resources.

*Palestinian.* Analysis of Palestinian children's evaluations of moral vignettes indicated that, in general, positive moral judgments and reasoning increased after viewing the show. In particular, for four of the eight vignettes ("Different Country," "Games," "Balloons," and "Party Hats"), positive judgments increased for children exposed to the show. That is, Palestinian children who watched the show over the controlled viewing period were more likely to choose inclusion in these stories compared with children in the control group. As an example, children's judgments supporting inclusion of a child with a different nationality in the "Different Country" vignette increased after viewing the show. Positive results were also found in Palestinian children's reasoning used to support their judgments regarding the moral vignettes. Overall, vignettes involving the inclusion or exclusion of a child based on group membership (e.g., gender, culture) were found to show a positive moral orientation by Palestinian children to these types of stories. More specifically, moral reasoning about friendship in the "Different Country" vignette and inclusion reasoning in the "Games" and "Party Hats" vignettes increased among children who viewed the show. As an example, when asked why the group should not exclude the child with a different hat in the "Party Hats" vignette, one girl, age 5.86 years, supporting inclusion, reasoned, "Because we should all participate in the party, unlike the mouse in the story. Everybody should get dressed like he/she wants."

Further, Palestinian children showed positive increases in their evaluations of the wrongfulness of exclusion (e.g., "How wrong is it for the group to exclude this child?") for some of the moral vignettes. In particular, an increase in recognizing the wrongfulness of exclusion was shown for both the "Different Country" and "Ice Cream" vignettes by Palestinian children who viewed the show, compared with those who were not exposed to the show. When presented with the "Ice Cream" vignette, children, for example, explained why it was wrong to exclude someone who spoke a different language by saying, "Because Dani fell down and was injured. They should help him up and go buy ice cream together" (male, age 5.83 years). For this



story, Palestinian children identified with the injured child using reasoning based on empathy to support their evaluations. Overall, Palestinian children who were exposed to the show were found to evaluate moral transgressions in the positive direction. That is, children who viewed *Sesame Stories* showed positive increases in rejecting exclusion and conflict when presented with moral dilemmas in the context of peer relationships and friendships.

*Jordanian.* Analysis of Jordanian children's evaluations of moral vignettes indicated that, as with the other samples, this group of children showed positive judgments and prosocial reasoning after viewing the show. In particular, children's positive judgments of inclusion increased for the "Kite Flying" context (vignette involving stereotypes of others) for those who viewed the show, whereas change did not occur for children who did not view the show. (Notable changes were not found in the other seven vignettes.) Positive change was also found in Jordanian children's moral reasoning. More specifically, children's reasoning about prosocial behavior for the "Kite Flying" vignette and reasoning about inclusion for the "Sports" vignette were found to have changed in the positive direction for those children who viewed the show. As an example, when asked why the group should include someone from the opposite gender on their sports team, one child argued, "As he is alone they should play with him because it's too bad to leave him alone" (female, age 5.99 years). Further, Jordanian children showed positive increases in their evaluations of the wrongfulness of exclusion (e.g., "How wrong is it for the group to exclude this child?") for some of the moral vignettes. In particular, an increase in recognizing the wrongfulness of exclusion was shown for both the "Small" and "Kite Flying" vignettes by Jordanian children who viewed the show, compared with those who were not exposed to the show. When presented with the "Small" vignette, children, for example, explained why it was wrong to exclude someone who was smaller in physical stature by saying, "As there is no one playing with her, they should play with her" (female, age 5.29 years) and "They should let him play with them otherwise they will be mean" (male, age 5.73 years). Overall, as can be seen by the types of responses given by Jordanian children in response to the wrongfulness of exclusion, children who were exposed to the show not only had positive response to the characters and stories of the show, but, more important, demonstrated a positive moral orientation when asked to evaluate peer situations involving inclusion and exclusion based on various types of conflict.

*Overview of Results.* The findings from this second *Sesame Street* intervention deemed the program effective at promoting prosocial reasoning in young viewers. The results indicate that the interview methodology is an effective means to assess the level of enjoyment and age appropriateness of the intervention content, as well as the effects of intervention on young chil-

dren's social and moral reasoning. Additionally, the interview provided basic developmental information regarding how young children in the Middle East evaluate social conflict scenarios, particularly those that involve exclusion of children based on gender, cultural membership, and stereotypes.

## CONCLUSIONS

In summary, Sesame Workshop-produced shows like *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim* and *Sesame Stories* serve as effective sources of media interventions. One of the central reasons is that the curriculum goals for these shows are developmentally relevant and developmentally appropriate. The foci include peer interaction, peer relationships, autonomy, and identity, and this is accomplished by concentrating on the facilitation of social competence, social skills, and moral understanding. Although these skills can be obtained through such intentional media interventions, it is unlikely that a single viewing of the programming will yield the desired effects. In our research, children viewed the shows multiple times, and we believe this is a necessary aspect of what makes the shows effective as a form of media intervention. To identify with the characters, children have to get to know them and understand the story content, story themes, and general framework of the show. We found that children enjoyed watching the shows; indeed, one of the successful aspects of the *Sesame Street* format is that repetition is built into the content. Repetition of themes and messages is important for young children, and particularly in an engaging, friendly, and positive format as that offered by *Sesame Street*.

Further, the introduction of these shows in war-torn regions of the world provides a powerful form of media intervention—one that can help to promote mutual respect and cultural understanding, and to reduce prejudice, stereotypes, and negative biases about others. In war-torn areas of the world, adults are often under extreme stress and/or living in difficult circumstances. A positive show for children provides a different world, one in which the stress and trauma of daily life are absent, and children can be exposed to a range of positive cultural and social messages. Providing young children with these skills and positive images of the self and the other will give them a strong positive social and intergroup foundation. By encouraging mutual understanding and respect, it is anticipated that children will generalize these themes to their daily social interactions with peers and, thus, begin the process of positive social exchanges with others.

It is vital to continue examining how effective these interventions are as the circumstances vary. In our study, preschool-age children were participants. Future studies should investigate the effectiveness of similar media interventions with different participant characteristics: Older children and

adolescents should be studied, as well as children and adolescents with differing levels of exposure to the conflict. It is likely that parents' encouragement of the lessons learned and teachers' lessons that complement and explore those from the programming will enhance the results, and this remains to be explored. In summary, we emphasized the importance of evaluating and measuring the effectiveness of developmentally appropriate media intervention projects by using developmentally informed methodologies. Our overall goal is to contribute to projects that are aimed at reducing negative perceptions between ethnic groups and increasing prosocial reasoning in children living in areas of conflict and war.

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## NOTE

1. When we mention the word *significant* we mean statistically significant,  $p < .05$ . To maintain the flow of the narrative, we do not include any quantitative information.

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