# JEWISH - ARAB STUDENTS' SOCIAL RELATIONS IN ISRAEL
## JEWISH - RELACIONES SOCIALES DE ESTUDIANTES ÁRABES EN ISRAEL

## Esther BAHAT

## Resumen

En Israel, los judíos y los árabes se ven como enemigos entre ellos . Este estudio examinó las actitudes entre ellos de los estudiantes judíos y árabes, que estudian en el mismo espacio académico. Se examinaron tres categorías: estereotipos (componente cognitivo); emociones (componente afectivo); ganas de estar en contacto social (componente de comportamiento). Se distribuyeron cuestionarios a 170 estudiantes de enfermería, árabes y judíos. Los resultados mostraron que los estudiantes de tercer y cuarto año revelaron más emociones positivas, estereotipos positivos y voluntad de estar en contacto social que los estudiantes de primer año.

## Palabras clave

Educación superior, estudiantes universitarios, estereotipos, convivencia.

## Abstract

In Israel Jews and Arabs view each other as enemies. This study examined attitudes of Jewish and Arab students, who are studying in the same academic space, towards each other. Three categories were examined: Stereotypes (cognitive component); emotions (affective component); willingness to be in social contact (behavioral component). Questionnaires were distributed to 170 nursing students - Arabs and Jews. Results showed that third and fourth-year students revealed more positive emotions, positive stereotypes and willingness to be in social contact that first-year student.

## Keywords

Stereotypes, emotions, social contact, attitudes.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The complex social relationships between Jews and Arabs in Israel are characterized by conflict, stereotypes, negative emotions and unwillingness to be in social contact. The conflict between the two ethnics groups is nurtured, among other factors, by the collective historical narrative held by each side. This collective narrative characterizes the group and is passed down from generation to generation and shapes the group experiences. Each group's unique story, beliefs and worldview help the members of the group to which they identify (in-group) to understand the reality in which they exist, to defend themselves from the difficult effects of the conflict and to justify their behavior towards the members of other group which they are not identify (out-group).

Many studies examining the Jewish-Arab conflict offer intervention programs which are carried out to improve relations between Jews and Arabs (Bar-Tal, Rosen & Nets-Zehngut 2009). These studies are based on the contact hypothesis also known as Intergroup *"Contact Theory"* (Allport, 1954). Allport (1954) suggested that positive effects of intergroup contact occur in contact situations characterized by four key conditions: Equal status, intergroup cooperation, common goals, and support by social and institutional authorities. The importance of contact in mediating difference has a longer tradition in the discipline of psychology (Valentine, 2008). It has been described as one of the best ways to improve relations among groups that are experiencing conflict (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Allport (1954) argued that contact is an effective stereotypes reduction strategy. The premise of Allport's theory (1954) is that interpersonal contact is one of the most effective ways to reduce stereotypes between majority and minority group members. The basis of this argument is that people are uncomfortable with the unknown and so feel anxious about encounters with difference. However, if people have the opportunity to communicate, with each other, they are able to understand and appreciate different points of views involving their way of life, which in decrease feelings of uncertainty and anxiety by producing a sense of knowledge or familiarity and increase a perception of predictability and control.

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The most common way to increase understanding and empathy, between people from different ethnic groups in conflict, is through dialogue in intervention programs (Valentine, 2008). The problem is that the Jews as the minority group are the initiators of these intervention programs and these intervention programs are carried out with the Jewish culture.

Academic space is a "*natural space of encounter*" that provides the opportunity for encounters between people from different ethnic groups with tension among them (Valentine, 2008). It is not an intervention plan of intercultural dialogue that increase understanding and empathy among participants but only an opportunity for interpersonal contact that may reduce stereotypes and increase positive attitudes towards each other.

The literature is scarce in investigating the way in which members of each ethnic group (Jewish and Arabs) perceive each other, as a result, of studying together in the same academic space. This study seeks to address this gap in the research.

Hence, the research question is: Does communication over time between students from different ethnic groups (Jews and Arabs) promote positive attitudes towards each other? The aim of the study was to examine attitudes of Jewish-Israeli students and Arab-Israeli students, who are studying in the same academic faculty, towards each other. Three categories were examined: Stereotypes (a cognitive component); emotions (an affective component); and willingness to be in social contact (a behavioral component). More specifically, the study compared first-year students with third and fourth-year students, toward each other, by examining the contribution of studying in the same university to the development of positive emotion (Vescio, Sechrist & Paolucci, 2003); decrease of stereotypes (Vescio, Sechrist & Paolucci, 2003) and negative stereotypes (Khuri, 2004); willingness to engage in social contact.

## 1.1. Theoretical background

Three categories can indicate the quality of the relationship between the two groups: (1) the stereotypes (positive and negative) that each group holds towards the other group members (outgroup); (2) the intensity of the emotions (positive and negative) they feel towards each other; (3) the degree of the willingness to be in social contact with each other.

## 1.2. Stereotypes

A stereotype is as a set of beliefs about the characteristics of a social category of people (Bar-Tal, 1996). Human beings as group members are influenced in their behavior towards other group members by the stereotypes they have formed (Brewer & Kramer, 1985; Stephan, 1985). Stereotypes are based on the assumptions that objects, events or people are alike in several important aspects, and therefore can be grouped together and treated as similar (i.e., a table, a Jew, an Arab), while at the same time differentiating them from others (Smith & Medin, 1981).

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Characteristics attributed to categories of people are stereotypes. The term "concept" is used interchangeably with the term "category" (e.g., Smith & Medin, 1981; Neisser, 1987). In the present context, specific social groups are considered concepts or categories. Characteristics attributed to categories of people are stereotypes.

Concepts are symbolic representations of social groups and they are acquired from a very early stage of life (Bar-Tal, 1996). Children can acquire from their social environment concepts of social groups without ever seeing them (Mervis, 1987) through words. For example, the words "an Arab" or "Arabs" symbolize a social group with some characteristics associated with it, which in fact constitute the stereotype (Stangor & Lange, 1994). Each group has been stereotyped the other group in negative characteristics ("primitives", "cruel", "ugly" or "dirty") (Tsemach, 1980; Benyamini, 1981).

Although ethnic and racial attitudes are assumed to develop due to the influence of socialization contexts during the childhood, a study by Miklikowska (2017) showed that adolescents with immigrant friends to be less affected by parents and peers' stereotypes than youth without immigrant friends.

Another feature that contributes to the development of stereotypes relates to the degree of information that people hold for other people in the other group. Naturally, when a person has more information about people in the other group his tendency to generalize all members

of the group and his attitudes are less negative (Shachar & Amir, 1996).

Hence, I hypothesis that interpersonal interactions between people from different ethnic groups with the goal of achieving an academic degree will decrease negative stereotypes towards each other group: Jews / Arabs.

*Hypothesis H1:* Third and fourth-year Jewish and Arab students who are learning together will express fewer negative stereotypes towards each other than first-year students.

## 1.3. Emotions

Emotion "helps us sort out the relationship between ourselves and the world" (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 118). Emotion involves cognitive-evaluative verbal conscious processes as well as non-verbal conscious symbolic processes (Bucci & Miller, 1993). Emotion is also central to organism survival. Emotion responses alert the organism to flee, fight, or approach, contact (Damasio, 1999). However, this dynamic aspect is not arbitrary: Emotional patterns are partly involved in learning processes and experiences of infancy and childhood as members of certain ethnic's groups (Damasio, 1999; Nussbaum, 2001).

Interpersonal interactions between people from different ethnic groups may help them become aware of their negative emotions (Khuri, 2004). This process of interpersonal self-reflection might develop the ability to manage and regulate

one's own emotions which will increase dialogue understanding (Khuri, 2004). Dialogue involves face-to-face communication among people of dominant and subordinate social groups (Khuri, 2004) and thus improve relations and increase positive emotions towards each other.

Hence, I hypothesis that casual communication between students from different ethnic groups will increase positive emotions towards each other group: Jews / Arabs.

*The hypothesis H2* is: Third and fourth-year Jewish and Arab students who are learning together will express more positive emotions towards each other than first-year students.

## 1.4. Social Contact

Attitudes towards other group members determine also the degree of willingness to be in social contact with each other (Yuchtman-Yaar & Inbar, 1986).

Bogardus (1967) developed a scale, which called social distance scale, at which can used to measure the desire of group members to be in social contact with each other. Social distance refers to the degree of closeness or acceptance that member of a group feels towards members of another group (Yuchtman-Yaar & Inbar, 1986). In fact, it is a dimension of social interactions between groups. The empirical study of this phenomenon was conducted by Bogardus (1967). Bogardus developed a scale that

allows ordering of the social distance at which any group desires to be in relation with other group. The researcher used questionnaires in which people were asked to indicate the kind of relationship that they would accept or reject with members of other group (for example, accepting a neighbor in one's street, accepting a close kinship). Results show a high degree of intergroup consensus on the ranking of groups in terms of social distance, and that this ranking is dictated largely by the dominant group in society.

The traditional university classes, where students are expected to take notes and study independently promoted to cooperative learning. With this kind of methodology, students are more likely to acquire skills for life beyond university (Burdett, 2003). Definition of Cooperative Learning Cooperation is working together to accomplish shared goals to maximize their own and each other's learning (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1998). According to the Johnson and Johnson Model (1999), cooperative learning includes five criteria that define true cooperative learning groups: 1. Positive interdependence: members understand that they must learn together to accomplish the goal; they need each other for support, explanations, and guidance. 2. Individual accountability: the performance of each group member is assessed against a standard, and members are held responsible for their contribution to achieving goals. 3. Promotive interaction: students interact face-to-face and close together, not across the room. 4. Group processing: groups reflect on their collaborative efforts and decide on ways to improve effectiveness. 5. Development of small-

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group interpersonal skills: these skills, such as giving con constructive feedback, reaching consensus, and involving every member, are necessary for effective group functioning.

Cooperative learning enhances interactions between students from different ethnic groups. As a result, the social distance between the students from the different ethnic groups will decrease and the willingness to be in social contact will increase.

*The hypothesis H3* is: Third and fourth-year Jewish and Arab students will be more willing to be in contact with each other than first-year students.

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1. Sample

Sample consists of 170 nursing students – Arabs and Jews studying in a university in the center of Israel. Participants were first-year students ($n = 83$, 48.8%), and third and fourth-year students ($n = 87$, 51.2%). They were 20 to 45 years old, with a mean age of 25.55 years ($SD$=4.24 years). Out of the first-year students 29 were men (34.9%), and 54 were females (65.1%). In the third and fourth-year students 39 were men (44.8%), and 48 were females (55.2%). 103 students were single (60.6%), 56 were married (32.9%), and 11 were divorced (6.5%). About 46% were Jewish ($n = 79$, 46.5%), and 52% were Arabs ($n = 89$, 52.4%). Most of the Arabs students were Moslem

($n = 57$, 64.1%), others were Christian ($n = 22$, 24.7%), or Druze ($n = 10$, 11.2%).

### 2.2. Instruments

Questionnaires were used to examine the relations between students of the two groups (Jews and Arabs) in the three categories: Stereotypes, emotions, and the willingness to be in social contact.

*Stereotype index*: To assess the stereotypes of the students towards each other group (Jews / Arabs) stereotypes were measured on a five-point Likert type scale from "not at all" (1) to "very high extent" (5). The stereotypes were taken from previous studies where they have stood the test of reliability and validity (Fishman, 2014; Rosen, 2006).

Nine items described negative stereotypes (Lazy, unstable, primitive, violent, stingy, liar, stupid, coward, dirty), and seven items described positive stereotypes (generous, smart, honest, brave, intelligent, hard-worker, clean). The negative stereotypes were reversed, and a good internal consistency was found α=.81.

*Emotional reactions*: The emotional reactions were obtained by asking the students how they felt towards students in each other group (Jews / Arabs). The items were taken from previous studies (Fishman, 2014; Rosen, 2006; Ybarra & Stephan, 1994) where they have stood the test of reliability and validity.

Ten items were negative expressions (disgust, fear, contempt, hate, guilt, shame, boredom, anger, anxiety, and sorrow), and eight items were positive expressions (sympathy, affection, hope, curiosity, happiness, surprise, approval, and admire). The items were rated on a five-point Likert type scale from "not at all" (1) to "very high extent" (5). The negative expressions were reversed, and a good internal consistency was found *α*=.85.

*Social contact index*: The students were asked about their willingness to do some activities with each other (Jews/Arabs). Five activities were measured based on study conducted by Schwarzwald & Cohen (1982). I used the Hebrew version (Fishman, 2014) where it has stood the test of reliability and validity.

The measure activities were: To meet outside the university, to learn together, to host in my home, to live near-by, to be a friend. The five items were rated on a five-point Likert type scale from "definitely disagree" (1) to "definitely agree" (5). Good internal consistency was found α=.87.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1. Descriptive results

Table 1 presents means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations among the attitude's subscales: Positive expressions, negative expressions, positive stereotypes, negative stereotypes, and social contact. Results in the table show that average means for the dimensions are above mid-scale. It shows that all positive aspects (positive stereotypes, positive emotions and contact), were positively interrelated, while negative aspects (negative stereotypes and negative emotions) were negatively related to social contact.

### 3.2. Professional correlates of social relations

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations for the five attitudes subscales (N = 170)

| | M (SD) | Negative Emotions | Positive Stereotypes | Negative Stereotypes | Social Contact |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Positive Emotions** | 3.59 (1.28) | -.55** | .83** | -.54** | .74** |
| **Negative Emotions** | 3.51 (1.27) | | -.55** | .85** | -.55** |
| **Positive Stereotypes** | 3.53 (1.28) | | | -.55** | .78** |
| **Negative Stereotypes** | 3.51 (1.27) | | | | -.55** |
| **Contact** | 3.53 (1.27) | | | | |

**p < .01, range 1-5.

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Year of academic studies (first-year compared to third and fourth-year) was examined with regard to the social relations between students of the two groups (Jews and Arabs) in the three categories: Stereotypes, emotions, and the willingness to be in social contact.

ANOVA revealed a significant difference regarding the dimension of positive expression ($F$= 190.116, $df$ = 1, $Sig.$ = .000). Third and fourth-year students ($M$ = 4.43, $SD$ = 0.64) express more positive expression towards outgroup students than first-year students ($M$ = 2.57, $SD$ = 1.07).

In the same direction ANOVA revealed a significant difference between first-year students and third and fourth-year student regarding the dimension of negative expressions ($F$= 181.465, $df$ = 1, $Sig.$ = .000). First-year students ($M$ = 4.44, $SD$ = 0.63) express more negative expressions towards outgroup students than third and fourth-year students ($M$ = 2.62, $SD$ = 1.07).

ANOVA revealed also a significant difference regarding the dimension of positive stereotypes ($F$= 190.116, $df$ = 1, $Sig.$ = .000). Third and fourth-year students ($M$ = 4.43, $SD$ = 0.64) express more positive stereotypes towards outgroup students than first-year students ($M$ = 2.57, $SD$ = 1.07).

In the same direction ANOVA revealed a significant difference between first-year students and fourth-year student regarding the dimension of

negative stereotypes ($F$= 181.465, $df$ = 1, $Sig.$ = .000). First-year students ($M$ = 4.45, $SD$ = 0.65) express more negative stereotypes towards outgroup students than third and fourth-year students ($M$ = 2.62, $SD$ = 1.07).

Regarding the dimension of engaging in social contact with outgroup students' ANOVA revealed also a significant difference ($F$= 191.693, $df$ = 1, $Sig.$ = .000). Third and fourth-year students ($M$ = 4.44, $SD$ = 0.64) express more willingness to engage in social contact with outgroup students than first-year students ($M$ = 2.59, $SD$ = 1.05).

## 4. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine social interactions between members of two groups that are in conflict in Israel - Jews and Arabs. Most of the studies offer intervention programs to increase understanding and empathy among participants (Valentine, 2008). No study has examined casual social interactions among people of different ethnic groups because of studying in the same academic space/university.

To address this gap in knowledge this study examined three categories of reciprocal social relations: Stereotypes, emotions, and willingness to be in social contact. A comparison was done between first-year students and third and fourth-year students.

Based on study results it could be concluded that studying together encourage social interactions within the two ethnic groups (Jews and Arabs), which increased positive attitudes towards each other. Results showed that third and fourth-year students revealed more positive emotions and positive stereotypes towards outgroup students that first-year student. Third and fourth-year students also declared readiness to be in social contact which is not necessary for learning purposes (for example, accepting a neighbor in one's street).

In Israel Jews and Arabs view each other as enemies. The long conflict between Jews and Arabs in the region caused each side to make great efforts to delegitimize the other (Bar-Tal, 1988, 1989). The study results show that investment in financial or human capital, by interventions programs is not always necessary. Sometimes the opportunities for casual communication in a natural space develop understanding between ethnic group members that are in conflict for several generations and increase positive attitudes towards each other. However, to validate the research results there is a need to examine the attitudes of Jewish and Arab students, toward each other, in different universities and colleges.

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