READ TO CHANGE: THE ROLE ARABIC LITERATURE CAN PLAY TO REDRESS THE
DAMAGE OF STEREOTYPING ARABS IN AMERICAN MEDIA

A dissertation submitted
to Kent State University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Mohammed Albalawi

May 2016

© Copyright
All rights reserved
Except for previously published
Dissertation written by
Mohammed H. Albalawi

B.A., King Abdulaziz University, 2001
M.A., King Abdulaziz University, 2010
Ph.D., Kent State University, 2016

Approved by
Babacar M’Baye ________________________, Chair, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Mark Bracher ________________________, Members, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Sarah Rilling
Richard Feinberg
Ryan Claassen

Accepted by
Robert Trogdon, Chair, Department of English
James L. Blank, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTERS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. UNDERSTANDING STEREOTYPES</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. REPRESENTATIONS OF ARABS IN MEDIA</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. REDUCING STEREOTYPES DAMAGE THROUGH <em>MEN IN THE SUN</em></td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. IMPROVING ATTITUDES THROUGH <em>THEY DIE STRANGERS</em></td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. LIST OF ARABIC NARRATIVES</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. What Literature Can Do ..............................................................................................................50
Figure 2. Francine’s Arrest .........................................................................................................................67
Figure 3. Advertisement Poster for The Dictator .....................................................................................78
Figure 4. The Fictional Flag of Wadiya .....................................................................................................81
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My dissertation would not have been possible without the support of my committee, friends, and family. My committee was excellently steered by Dr. Babacar M’Baye who worked tirelessly with me to improve all aspects of my work. Babacar, I am very much indebted to you. Dr. Mark Bracher is the professor with whom I took the class that defined my scholarly goals. His extensive knowledge on everything from literary studies to cognitive science continues to impress and inspire me. I also thank Dr. Richard Feinberg and Dr. Sarah Rilling who have graciously improved my writing and arguments with their invaluable suggestions. I also would like to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Ryan Claassen for his advice and assistance. My grateful thanks are also extended to the English faculty at Kent State University with whom I took classes. You were always supportive and offered help when needed. I have learned a lot from you. Finally, I thank my family for their unconditional love and unwavering support over the years. I would like to thank my dear mother has been supportive throughout my sojourn in the States.
DEDICATION

To my late father, who I wish from the bottom of my heart could have lived to see me grow academically.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

This dissertation draws heavily from the works of Mark Bracher to redress the stereotyping of Arabs in American media. While it is also inspired by other scholarship, as cited elsewhere in the manuscript, this project is particularly indebted to Bracher’s important contributions in studying literature, stereotypes, empathy, schemas, and other aspects of human psychology that I have extensively drawn on to understand the nature of stereotyping Arabs in American media and the role literature can play to address negative stereotypes. Notable works to which this study is also indebted include David J. Schneider’s *The Psychology of Stereotyping* (2004) and Gordon B. Moskowitz’s *Social Cognition: Understanding Self and Others* (2005), each of which studies stereotypes and the role that cognitive processes play in social behavior. Moreover, Martin Hoffman’s *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice* (2007) and Becky Lynn Omdahl’s *Cognitive Appraisal, Emotion, and Empathy* (1995) are significant works to which this dissertation is indebted with regard to discussing theories of empathy.

The subjects of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination have engaged the interests of social psychologists, but also educators, ethnic minority activists, and scholars in many fields. For example, there has been a wide range of research in the study of the stereotypes of African Americans (Gaertner & Dovidio 1986), women (Deaux & Major 1987), homosexuals (Herek 1987), and Muslims (Suleiman 1999), to list just a few. The study of stereotyping and prejudice
is important for understanding how people react to each other and how they might experience negative outcomes.¹

One can pose a simple question: Where exactly do stereotypes come from? Rupert Brown notes that stereotypes “are embedded in the culture in which we are raised and live, and that they are conveyed and reproduced in all the usual socio-cultural ways” (69). These “socio-cultural” ways include school (for example, through privileging certain individuals and ignoring others), parents (through forbidding their children to play with specific children), and media (through the representations of ethnic groups).² These are potent sources for stereotypes. David Schneider states that not only does culture provide the content of stereotypes, but it also boosts them, causing us to stereotype people (322). However, the fact that stereotypes derive from different cultural records does not necessarily mean that the media cannot be held accountable for significantly spreading and perpetuating the stereotypes of various groups.³ In an age of heavy exposure to media, Hollywood (the American film and television industry) has portrayed people of various ethnic groups, religions, races, sexualities, and more in both positive and negative lights.

However, the negative images are prominent.⁴ Even though the positive portrayals of Arabs have appeared in media in many features, Arabs have suffered from negative media coverage and stereotyping in the United States for over 100 years, but most notably within the last few decades. This distorted media image resulted in many people seeing Arabic people as dangerous and Arabs being treated as outcasts. These negative images can be ascribed to the lack of knowledge and proper education regarding this group. Such portrayals in American media shape the perceptions of the twenty-two countries that constitute the Arab world.
Because literature has the potential to change our perceptions of others, this dissertation endeavors to show that carefully crafted Arabic literature can mitigate the harm done by the negative stereotyping of Arabs as presented in American media. This project explores two basic themes. The first discusses the psychology of stereotyping—What is a stereotype? How, When, and Why are stereotypes formed? What harm do stereotypes cause? To show how stereotypes affect us, this dissertation analyzes representations of Arabs in American media, more specifically in “Stan of Arabia” (2005) and The Dictator (2012). The second theme discusses how negative representations of Arabs may be alleviated through Arabic literature. More particularly, this project argues that Ghassan Kanafani’s Men in the Sun and Mohammad Abdul-Wali’s They Die Strangers can be used to promote a better understanding of Arabic people in American society. These novels use imagery and concepts that educators can use to invite readers to understand Arabs—their beliefs, conflicts, and views, which may ultimately correct the faulty representations of Arabic cultures that have appeared in American media for over a century.

**Situating the Project and Methodology**

This project is broken into five chapters. Following the introduction, the second chapter provides a general discussion of what stereotypes are, how they work, what cognitive structures and processes are involved, and how they affect people’s perceptions, judgments, emotions, and actions regarding others. This chapter also examines the theoretical schools of thought in the representations of Arabs, as these representations will all be relative to our eventual discussion of the use of Arabic literature to ameliorate them. The third chapter discusses how Arabs have been represented and how stereotypes are formed by offering analytical examinations of two features from the media: one from TV (“Stan of Arabia”) and one from film (The Dictator). The fourth
and fifth chapters offer close readings of *Men in the Sun* and *Die Strangers* respectively, and discuss the role literature plays in helping one better understand others and their attitudes toward them. In these chapters, a discussion is offered regarding the potential power of literature for transforming people’s attitudes, as well as for exploring the psychology of empathy—how one shares the specific emotional states of others, drawing on the major works of contemporary empathy theorists. The discussion of the two novellas seeks to: (1) identify elements that educators can use to facilitate an understanding of others who are culturally different, and (2) expose certain false and harmful cultural representations of Arabs, and ultimately promote empathy.

**Understanding Stereotyping**

In the past few decades, there has been a steady growth of interest in studying the representations of Arabs as evidenced by books and increasing numbers of journal articles. Scholars have talked abundantly about how the images of Arabs, which have appeared in American media for over a century, have been mostly ugly. However, research on the representations of Arabs has paid little attention to the following two important elements:

1. The acknowledgment of the stereotypes’ validity— is there a kernel of truth behind the stereotypes? *(Stereotype Accuracy)*

2. The understanding of stereotypes: (a) what is the nature of stereotypes? (b) How, when, and why are stereotypes formed? And (c) How do they affect us? *(Understanding of Stereotypes)*

**Stereotype Accuracy**

To say that all stereotypes are inaccurate is an inaccurate statement itself. Research has shown that cultural stereotypes of social groups have at least some “kernel of truth.” This kernel of truth comes as a result of attitudes, actions, or behaviors committed by individuals from the
stereotyped categories. For example, the stereotype of Arabs as wealthy Sheikhs is a result of the fact that there are many fabulously wealthy Arabs from oil-producing countries. Thus, it is no surprise that many people equate Arabs with Sheikhs who have come to represent fabulous wealth, greed, and more. This perception has been ingrained in American popular culture for many decades, even before the discovery of oil.\(^7\) However, even if the stereotype is in part accurate, the problem is that it is frequently exaggerated and overgeneralized.\(^8\) Not all Arab nations produce oil. In fact, the majority of Arab nations are considered poor, and even in places where one expects people to live privileged lives, suffering exists, embedded in the poor’s plight. When others ascribe a certain stereotype to a people-group as a whole, this can result in an inaccurate representation because there are many that may not fit into that stereotyping. Therefore, stereotypes are not fair to the individual being judged because the stereotype cannot be true of all of the group members. Sometimes the stereotypes can be harmful to the stereotyped individual. For example, when a man thinks that because a woman is emotional, she cannot be a good manager, such a belief is more likely to harm the job candidate.\(^9\)

\textit{Understanding of Stereotype}

People have beliefs about others with whom they interact. These beliefs come from one’s prior experiences, including things others have told us (the messages that the media sends), inferences drawn based on what those others (and the media) have said, and actual personal interactions related to past experiences. Gordon Moskowitz states, “The information gathered from these experiences provides for us expectancies—a set of probable actions and attitudes we can anticipate in others” (439). In this sense, stereotypes are beliefs we hold about groups and these beliefs affect our interactions with those groups (Oakes et al. 1).
The most basic cognitive process involved in stereotyping is categorization (Schneider 1997; Brown 2010). Before stereotyping can take place, an individual must be seen as a member of one of more categories to which stereotypes may apply. Moskowitz believes that the placement of an individual into a category creates meaning by triggering associated beliefs linked to this category, leading essentially to triggering social stereotypes, and if the stereotype is activated, there is perceptual readiness (441). The stereotype is incorporated into the perceiver’s responses, altering the type of judgments, impressions, emotions, and behaviors that are associated with the person being perceived (451). The outcome of categorization, as embedded in the distortion of perception or the exaggeration of an individual’s true characteristics, influences our interactions with people identified as members of a particular group. When categorizing a group of people, we draw inferences about them. The inferences we draw do not come from nothing. They are derived from prior knowledge or experiences because, as Schneider points out, “there are no naked experiences” (120). This prior-knowledge is called a schema. Schemas exist to help us recognize, understand, and describe a stimulus (122). In this sense, stereotypes are schemas that provide us with a better understanding of our experiences (170). Basically, stereotyping involves two distinct processes: (1) categorization (labeling an individual as belonging to a group) and (2) inferences (triggering a set of beliefs about that person).

Research on the representations of Arabs has failed to pay attention to the nature of stereotypes. Before explaining how literature can help alleviate the harm caused by the stereotypes of Arabs, this project argues that a proper understanding of the nature of stereotypes is crucial to mitigating the damage that stereotypes may cause for any group. Since this project tackles the stereotypes of Arabs, the discussion focuses on this group, but other groups can lend
themselves to similar treatments. Using theories in psychology, this project explores: (1) how Arabs are classified, and how certain images of Arabs trigger the categories that are associated with them; (2) how stereotypes regarding Arabs are activated, leading to the distortion of people’s perceptions of Arabs; (3) how these perceptions influence people’s interactions with Arabic people; (4) how the causes of the negative stereotypes are implicitly misattributed to the people who supposedly embody them instead of to the forces beyond their control; (5) how the ascribed negative traits are used to perpetuate the antithetical relationship between ingroup and outgroup members that undermines the common humanity between the groups and results in the dehumanization of the other, and finally (6) how Arabic literature can develop more positive schemas regarding Arabs, which may eventually replace existing faulty ones.

Representations of Arabs

This dissertation also explores the theoretical schools of thought involved in the representations of Arabs. The focus will be on American movies and TV shows. Data were collected and reviewed that draw on the major works of Jack Shaheen, but also extends his research by using a wide-range of other sources. While many scholars believe that American media have been responsible for giving hundreds of millions of people around the world a distorted image of Arabs, and while these images have had a great impact on people’s perceptions of Arabs, it is important to assert that most of these images go many centuries back. The media, however, helped intensify and circulate most of these old images, as well as create and spread new ones. In order to understand the ways in which images of Arabs have evolved, one should look at Edward Said’s revolutionary work, Orientalism (1978). But first, a clear distinction between Arabs and Muslims needs to be established.
Frequently, Muslims and Arabs get intertwined and mistakenly equated as belonging to the same group. Consequently, many people perceive Muslims as Arabs and vice versa. Because the Arab region is the cradle of Islam, often people assume Arabs and Muslims are the same. This is not so. Although there are many Arab Muslims, they only represent a minority of Muslims. There are over nearly 1.5 billion people following Islam, and Arabs constitute only one-fifth of the Muslim population (Shaheen, Guilty XI). Arabs are an ethnic group whose major characteristic is the language. The Arab world is composed of different countries, with diverse cultures, beliefs, and a variety of religions. There are millions of Arabs who are not Muslims—there are Christians, Jews, and even atheists. On the other hand, Muslims are people who follow the religion of Islam. They speak tens of different languages and reside in the six continents and constitute a majority in 55 countries (Nydell xxiii).

In Said’s *Orientalism*, the terms “Arabs” and “Muslims” are grouped in an intertwined representation. Even though the term “Orientalism” refers to everything from West Africa to East Asia, Said restricts the term mostly to the depictions Arabs and Muslims. It is important to ascertain through the lens of Orientalism how the representations of Arabs have been ingrained in the West’s conceptualization since the Middle Ages. Said states that the concept of Orientalism emerged first as an academic discipline (49). In the fourteenth century, Europe became interested in learning about Arabs. Said traces Europeans’ quest for knowledge about Arabs and their world to the Middle Ages, specifically to the Church Council of Vienna of 1312 which set up a number of university chairs for the study of Oriental languages including Arabic (49-50). Then the term Orient was equated with Islam, as Islam appeared to Europe in the early Middle Ages (59). Said claims that after Islam experienced colossal growth—and after the conquest of Persia, Syria, North Africa, and Egypt by Muslims—Islam came to represent “terror,
devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians” (59). Said states that European Christian scholars believed that Islam was a heresy, and the Prophet Mohammed was “the epitome of lechery, debauchery, sodomy, and a whole battery of assorted treacheries” (62). Later, Western scholars adopted these beliefs and accepted them as a way of distinguishing themselves from the Orientals. Through being notably different and self-thought of as superior, and through attributing prejudiced beliefs about the Orient, Europeans adopted the idea of a divided world by using the concept of “ours” and “theirs” in their discourse.

The scope of Orientalism changed immensely with Napoleon’s occupation of Egypt in the eighteenth century, which, despite its failure, “gave birth to the entire modern experience of the Orient as interpreted from within the universe of discourse founded by Napoleon in Egypt, whose agencies of domination and dissemination included the Institut and the Déscription” (87). The occupation gave rise to many literary works about the Orient. The West attempted to learn about the Orient not on the basis of contacts, but rather through text. With the coming of the nineteenth century, the Orient had turned into a show. Said writes that the Orient is “watched, since its almost (but never quite) offensive behavior issues out of a reservoir of infinite peculiarity; the European, whose sensibility tours the Orient, is a watcher, never involved, always detached…” (103). In the second half of the 19th century, during the British and French presence in the Orient, while the Orient was divided between the European powers, the British and the French perceived the Orient as:

a geographical—and cultural, political, demographical, sociological, and historical—over whose destiny they believed themselves to have traditional entitlement. The Orient to them was no sudden discovery, no mere historical
accident, but an area to the east of Europe whose principal worth was uniformly defined in terms of Europe. (221)

Many Europeans defined themselves in contrast to Orientals. For example, if the Orientals are irrational and uncivilized, then Europeans are automatically rational and civilized. At the turn of the 20th century, after the Arab Revolt and its aftermath, the domination of Europe over the Orient became less firm, which caused changes in the symbolic structures of Orientalism—the Orient appeared to be a challenge (248) as fears emerged that it would get an upper hand over Europe. As a result, racist propaganda increased with the spread of ideas that the “Orientals’ bodies are lazy, that the Orient has no conception of history, of the nation…that the Orient is essentially mystical—and so on” (253).

Later, Orientalists had an immense influence in American popular culture, academia, and politics, which led to the cultural stereotypes of Arabs. Said states, for example, that “in the films and television the Arab is associated either with lechery or bloodthirsty dishonesty” (286) and appears to be “sadistic, treacherous, low” (286). Said further suggests that the Arab’s traditional roles in the cinema are “slave trader, camel driver, moneychanger, colorful scoundrel” (287). During and after the Second World War, the representations of Arabs were mostly cruel. Said asserts that a survey entitled “The Arabs in American Textbooks” “reveals the most astonishing misinformation, or rather the most callous representations of an ethnic-religious group” (287). The American Orientalism that has evolved from Europe created a longstanding portrayal of Arabs, encompassing a myriad of negative images in countless features.

Arabs in American Media

A few voices have attempted to explore the representations of Arabs in American media. Jack Shaheen is one of these voices and a well-known scholar who has dedicated his work to
identifying these representations. He has written many articles and three books explaining the representations’ persistence, exposing their consequences for Arabs, and offering solutions for countering false stereotypes. His valuable documentation of the representations of Arabs paves the way for an understanding of how Arabs have been perceived. Adding more depth to Shaheen’s work, several other scholars have attempted to show how Arabs are represented in American media. Some scholars have revealed that the media representations of Arabs have been formed in conjunction with government policies (Little 2002). These representations have been affected by many political moments: from the decline of European colonialism to the founding of the state of Israel, the Arab oil embargo, the Iran hostage crisis, the First Gulf War, etc. (McAlister 2001). Despite the number of movies or television programs, most images of Arabs have been consistent over the decades: the men are Bedouin bandits, menacing sheikhs, or buffoons, and the women appear submissive, hopeless and vulnerable (Shaheen Reel Bad Arabs 2001). But it was September 11, 2001, that attached a much stronger stigma to the images of Arabs. Since the September 11 attacks, Islam in general, and Arabs in particular, have been painted as violent, ferocious, or simply as terrorists (Shaheen, Guilty 8).

However, in their investigations of the representations of Arabs in American media, scholars have mainly focused on merely one part of stereotypes: the ascription of negative traits to Arabs. Little attention has been given to the implicit contentions of the distinctiveness of these traits to Arabs (distinctiveness), the attribution of Arabs’ negative traits to internal causes (causal attribution), and the implicit assertions of the superiority of the stereotypers (ingroup favoritism). Mark Bracher argues in “Effective Strategies for Social Justice Pedagogy”, these are fundamental elements of stereotypes (2-4).
This dissertation attempts to address all these elements in both the nature of stereotypes and the discussion of how Arabic literature can promote changes in attitudes and stereotypes. This dissertation does not track all of the images of Arabic culture that have been found in American media but rather describes the threat of consistent negative representations so the reader can be fully aware of the problem and the need to dismantle it. To provide an analysis of the problem, this dissertation looks at the representations of Arabs in two features: “Stan of Arabia” and The Dictator. Each of these features is significant to our discussion for the following reasons. First, they present a countless number of fixed images of Arabs in general (The Dictator) and one particular Arab state (Stan of Arabia). Second, they show how those negative images are implicitly attributed to internal causes, ignoring situational factors. Finally, they implicitly show the advantage of the stereotypers. To analyze and interpret these representations in relation to their narrative context, this project will combine, as a theoretical framework, cultural theory, postcolonial discourse, and feminist criticism when exploring the representations of Arab women. Furthermore, Said’s critique of Orientalism is important for fostering an understanding of imperialism and how the ideas of superiority and practices of dominance have shaped how Arabs are perceived to this day.

The Power of Literature

For a long time, scholars have been tracking the influence of literature on people’s lives in an attempt to determine how its impact extends beyond providing pleasure. Such influences have been looked at as ranging from sentimentality to mind-reading adaptations to eliciting empathetic responses.17 Before empathy, the notion of sentimentalism and the author’s goal with regard to the moral effect of fiction had been explored. Michael Bell states that “for the writer of fiction there may arise…the question of where precisely lies the moral meaningfulness of the narrated events” (9). Moreover, the characters in fiction, according to Jonathan Gottschall, are
merely “ink people” whose main goal is to “shape our behaviors and our customs, [and]…they transform societies and histories” (144). Therefore, the world the novelist creates is a virtual representation of our real world. The novelist always makes this world “a metaphorical model of our own” (Gass 60). Drawing on existing scholarship on the function of literature, this project explores the ways in which the promotion of Arabic literature can help alleviate the negative stereotyping of Arabs in American media. There are two important places where literature works to foster positive changes in people’s attitudes. The first is the psychology of stereotyping. When discussing a literary work, the harmful traits of the stereotyped group can be better understood through addressing the faulty theories of causal attribution and distinctiveness, and through providing positive exemplars from the literary work itself.

The psychology of empathy is the second place where literature can help promote a better understanding of outgroups, and it becomes a perfect tool to aid us in learning how to reduce bias. In order for literature to be an effective tool, Mar and Oately add, “we must acknowledge the common humanity present between ourselves and dissimilar ones. Without the readers assuming the same (or similar) emotions, desires, and beliefs as the protagonist in the story, the phenomenon of transportation, enjoyment, and ultimately understanding would remain elusive” (181). Once readers understand the protagonists’ feelings, literature becomes a tool that encourages empathy and helps reduce bias toward the people in question. It is an opportunity for readers of literature to identify and understand a world that has not been fully experienced. While literature paves the way to understanding others’ beliefs, especially of those whose cultures or beliefs are different from one’s own, it is important to note that the central element teachers can use is empathy, and literature provides a useful tool for empathetic growth.
There are five modes for empathy arousal: (1) direct association (recalling similar experience from the past), (2) role taking (imagining oneself in another’s place), (3) emotional contagion or mimicry (imitating another’s expression of distress), (4) classical conditioning (observer’s empathetic feeling of distress at the same time someone having his/her own experience of distress), and (5) mediated/symbolic association (using language—through the meaning of words—to produce an empathetic response).

This project will focus on the first three modes—direct association, role taking, and emotional contagion—in the discussion of literature’s ability to induce empathetic responses in readers because these three modes appear notably in literature (Omdahl qtd. in Bracher “Effective Strategies for Social Justice Pedagogy” 20). In a literary work, direct association requires only past feelings of pain or discomfort that can be evoked in the here-and-now by cues of distress from characters (Hoffman 47). For example, if readers are exposed to a character’s separation from their father it may remind a reader of past feelings of pain when they lost their own parent or loved one; therefore, an empathetic distress response is elicited. The separation cue leads the reader to empathize with the character because the experiences are similar—feelings of loss. As for role taking—which is also called perspective taking—this mode requires more cognitive effort. Readers need to understand the other’s situation, value, knowledge, goals, and reactions so that what is happening to the character can be imagined as happening to the reader, evoking empathetic response. Role taking can make the reader create mental representations of characters that can substantially overlap with the reader’s self-representations leading to stereotype and prejudice reduction. Empirical evidence gathered by social psychologists supports this view. The third mode, emotional contagion, means that the observer experiences emotions, such as anger, hilarity, or cheerfulness, parallel to the emotions of the
observed, as if the observer is infected. People, in these encounters, tend to involuntarily synchronize their facial expressions, postures, and emotional behaviors with that of others. Such emotional experiences enable people to feel another’s emotions.

In this dissertation, a comprehensive theory of stereotype alleviation is advanced. The theory is multifaceted, ranging from the study of the mechanism of stereotypes at both an individual and group level to the investigation of processes such as categorization, social perception, and representations in terms of schemas. Furthermore, stereotypes are studied in relation to group membership, attitudes, social identity, and their connection with prejudice and discrimination. The theory is charged with the study of literature and its development of attitudes of empathy and compassion towards others. Empathy is a core component for effecting change. Because research has shown that literature helps its readers to better understand life and people through empathizing with characters, this dissertation attempts to reveal how readers of carefully crafted Arabic literature exhibit less prejudice toward Arabs through cultivating a sense of connection with the characters, which eventually leads to a connection with what it means to be a human being. Because the word “Arabs” appears to have reduced individuals and countries to a distinct target open to stereotypes and bias, literary texts that represent Arabic culture and beliefs are needed as models for reducing negative stereotypes and promoting positive attitudes toward Arabs. *Men in the Sun* and *They Die Strangers* are such literary texts; each is significant for developing schemas that eventually replace existing ones.

**Are All Literary Works Effective Models?**

The effectiveness of literature to promote positive changes in people’s perceptions of others is not true of all fictional narratives. Some literary works do some damaging work through perpetuating stereotypes. For example, women are often portrayed as submissive wives, sex objects, or intellectually inferior to men. Another example is the misrepresentation of people
with psychological disorders such as autism. Moreover, some literary works affects the readers negatively when it leads them to “adopt unrealistic expectations” about life (Mar & Oatley 185). For instance, the research of Diekman, McDonald, and Gardner (2000) has shown that after reading more romance novels, women develop negative attitudes towards condom use, causing risky behaviors. Thus, the harm of some literary works is undeniable.

However, fiction is widely perceived as a learning tool—providing windows through which readers absorb social values. The novelist creates characters that hold a familiar psychology and the novelist is expected to be “a teacher of conduct” (Eastman 109). Even though there are some works of fiction that may generate bias and stereotyping against some groups, the availability of many carefully crafted works that help provide a better understanding of outgroup members gives an obvious reason for optimism. In order to determine which literary works are great and can be used as effective models, several factors are generally agreed upon that play a key role in such determination: the ability to increase knowledge and understanding (intellectual factors), the beauty of the composition (aesthetic factors), and the appeal to feelings (emotional factors). James Averill notes that great literature does have “universal appeal” and its ability to attain greatness universally is by “appealing to emotions that are basic to human nature” (6). The presence of these factors can provide a starting point for indicating which literary works can be effectively labeled as carefully crafted.

*Men in the Sun* and *They Die Strangers*

The Arab novelist and sociologist Halim Barakat notes that Arabic societies have “expressed [themselves] most effectively and genuinely in literature.” (500). There are many carefully crafted works in Arabic literature that have been widely regarded by critics as Arabic literary masterpieces. This project uses two literary works as case studies. Deemed by many to
be his masterpiece and hailed as “a canonical work in the Palestinian oeuvre,” Kanafani’s *Men in the Sun* reflects not only the Palestinians’ pursuit of freedom, but also the hope that overshadowed a lot of displaced Arab families.\(^{25}\) In *Men in the Sun*, the reader’s attention is focused on the Palestinians’ struggle, which is embedded in the lives of its four protagonists. *Men in the Sun* has attracted attention “because of its artful representation of the social, political, and historical crisis of a nation.”\(^{26}\) The author blends the past and the present to describe the lives of the Palestinian people at a critical period in their history.

*They Die Strangers* is another important work that presents a good understanding of Arabs. Because Arabic narratives remain largely unknown to non-Arab readers and because most translated and studied literary works are from Egypt, Lebanon, and Palestine, the use of this Yemeni narrative adds more depth to the understanding of Arabic literature. Shelagh Weir notes that Abdul-Wali is considered “a pioneer of fiction writing” as his works marked “a radical break from…traditional genres by focusing on contemporary themes, and by describing with vivid and compassionate realism the lives of ordinary people, especially the oppressed and socially marginal.”\(^{27}\) In *They Die Strangers*, the story centers on Abdou Said, an expatriate who leaves his wife and son in Yemen to seek work in Ethiopia in order to support them. The story explores the themes of alienation, sexuality, and identity loss, arising from physical displacement caused by the civil war and labor migration.

**Definitions of Terms**

- **Arabs**- "Arab" is a cultural and linguistic term that refers to people who speak Arabic and who are united by history.\(^{28}\)
- **Arabic**- It belongs to the Semitic group of languages, which also includes Hebrew, and Amharic. Arabic can be divided into two major kinds: Classical Arabic—the language of
the Qur'an—which was the dialect in Mecca and Modern Standard Arabic, which is an adapted form of Classical Arabic. Modern Standard Arabic is used in books, newspapers, on television and radio, in the mosques, and in conversation between educated Arabs from different countries. Local dialects vary. For example, an Algerian might have difficulty understanding a Kuwaiti, even though they speak the same language. In this case, they usually communicate using Modern Standard Arabic.

- **Arab Cultures** - The rich and diverse ways of life that exist not only among or within Arab people.

- **Arab Diaspora** - The Arab immigrants and their offspring around the world.

- **Arab World** - The Arab world is geographically and politically defined as the 22 Arabic-speaking countries that include Muslims, Christians, Jews, and atheists. The Arab world also includes the Arab diaspora.
CHAPTER TWO
UNDERSTANDING STEREOTYPES

In the past few decades, there has been a steady growth of interest in studying the representations of Arabs, as evidenced by the increasing number of journal articles. Scholars have talked abundantly about how the representations of Arabs, which have appeared in American media for over a century, have been mostly negative (e.g., Alsultany 2012; Shaheen 2001, 2008; and Ghareeb 1983). However, research on such representations of Arabs has paid little attention the explanation of the stereotyping process and the answers to the following questions: What is a stereotype? How, when, and why are stereotypes formed? How do they affect us? The answers to these questions are central because they give us a better understanding of stereotypes. Exposing a group’s stereotypes and discussing their harm are important but are not enough, as the frequent use of prejudices in our interactions with others creates a social problem when they negatively influence our judgments and behaviors toward outgroup members. Given that stereotypes are often misguided, yet not entirely resistant to change, understanding the processes underlying how they form and operate provides a good approach to changing them. Moreover, in order to modify stereotyping, one must look at a part of the individuals’ knowledge structure, or in other words schemas.

An initial understanding of schemas is significant because it integrates contextual information about past life experiences and interactions with people. Schemas are organized patterns of thought that categorize concepts and associations, which make them readily accessible for ascribing acquired knowledge to new situations. Each individual has a schema for
everything: places (restaurant, hotel, home), social situations (how one behaves at work), social roles (one’s expectations from one’s teacher), and gender and race. Stereotypes and schemas are closely related. While schemas are mental representations of past life experiences, stereotypes are tools that people use to simplify information about others based on their life experiences. For any stereotypes to change it requires an alteration in the schema. In order to achieve a change in the structure of a schema, one needs the persuasive power of empathy because empathy plays a significant role in shaping and directing one’s schemas.

Empathy is both a necessary and sufficient condition for producing change in one’s schemas, and it eventually reduces prejudice and discrimination. Empathy is crucial because it is a positive response that allows an individual to care for the suffering of another. Having empathy for another individual allows a person to bridge social, political, and economic barriers between him or her and other individuals and prevents stereotypes that lead to prejudice and discrimination. While paying attention to schemas, this dissertation will focus on literature’s power to induce empathy in readers and the use of these empathetic responses to direct one’s cognitive processes. Those processes, in turn, enable one to replace faulty schemas with well-rounded ones that can undo negative stereotypes.

A Brief Historical Overview of Stereotype

Alexander Haslam provides a concise and inclusive description of stereotypes, deeming them “sets of beliefs about the characteristics of groups of people” (119). Two examples of stereotypes are the ideas that women are emotional and that Asians are good at math. Stereotyping is the application of such beliefs when one encounters an individual from these social groups. ³⁰ In order to understand the current usage of the concept of stereotype, it is instructive to turn to Walter Lippmann whose landmark book, Public Opinion (1922), defined
the concept as people’s beliefs about a group. Lippmann considered stereotypes ethnocentric—evaluating others according to one’s own standards. In later research, the approach to understanding stereotyping has significantly been narrowed when the relationship between stereotype and prejudice were discussed. Katz and Braly (1933) argued that stereotypes develop as a result of “prejudicial influences” (288). More than two decades later, the research on prejudice and stereotyping rapidly expanded. Gordon Allport offered a wide contribution to stereotype research with his milestone work, *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954). Allport’s study is considered revolutionary because he brought the subject of ethnic stereotyping into behavioral science by looking at it as a case of cognitive functioning. While early theorists focused on the definition of stereotype and its relationship with prejudice, later ones emphasized how social structure creates and justifies biases. In 1979, Henri Tajfel proposed the Social Identity Theory (SIT), arguing that groups to which people belong are considered as a source of pride and self-esteem. The theory suggests that social groups give us a sense of belonging in the social world, which can lead to ingroup members discriminating against outgroups. SIT explains the division of the world into “we” and “they” (or the Other).

The subject of stereotyping attracted scattered attention until Oakes, Haslam, and Turner’s *Stereotyping and Social Reality* (1994) and Schneider’s *The Psychology of Stereotyping* (2004). These works added important dimensions to the study of stereotypes, exploring what they are, how they function, and how they are linked to prejudice and discrimination. Presently, the study of prejudice and stereotyping represents a well-established area, incorporating theoretical perspectives that have helped to create better understanding and knowledge about the field. That, in turn, has attracted attention among social scientists in other fields. Stereotypes are generalizations about people that we constantly use. Schneider writes that “to deny ourselves the
use of generalization about people would result in intellectual and social chaos” (563). Yet, the problem with stereotypes is the representation or use of a set of harmful qualities perceived to reflect the essence of a particular group. Examples of such harmful qualities are blonde women are less intelligent or men are messy and unhygienic.

Moreover, when people hold certain beliefs such as the “French are romantic” or “Italians are stylish,” they are using the same stereotyping process as the one they employ when they say “blondes are stupid” or “Arabs are uncivilized.” The difference is that the latter pair is negative, which causes people to identify stereotypes as bad. Since stereotypes are simple generalizations about people, these generalizations can take both positive and negative forms. However, stereotypes are problematic because they are often negative and can have significant consequences and become particularly damaging when they generate prejudice that leads to discrimination.

In sum, the harm of stereotypes comes primarily from the negative ones. The negative impact of stereotypes is what makes the study of these beliefs crucial. Schneider explains that stereotypes are important because they do “dirty” work when they lead to public words or actions that result in discrimination or racial profiling (316). Stereotypes are often equated with the word “bad” because they sometimes focus on the negative features of groups rather than the positive ones. These negative features support prejudice and can cause real damage to members of stereotyped groups. Haslam argues that stereotypes are potent because they are usually formed by groups of people (119). Even though stereotypes are beliefs about people, they can generate negative attitudes and discriminatory behavior toward outgroups. Furthermore, stereotypes can create fallacies about other groups. For example, stereotypes of any social group may generate misconceptions about them—how they live, what their norms are—and may eventually lead to
social stigma.

The Nature of stereotyping Arabs

1. The Ascription of Negative Images to Arabs

As discussed earlier, many scholars, such as Alsultany and Shaheen, and Ghareeb have devoted a great deal of their work to exposing negative typecasting of Arabs in American media and showing that the positive images constitute a low percentage of the representations in the mainstream media. According to Shaheen’s findings, only 5 percent of the 1000+ films that have been produced in Hollywood since the film industry’s beginning include positive portrayal of Arabs.\(^{36}\) The problem with these scholars’ documentations of the negative images of Arabs is twofold. First, some scholars believe that Arabs are the most misrepresented group in American media and the negative images of other groups are trends in the past.\(^{37}\) However, Arabs are not the only victims of stereotyping and negative imagery. African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, Italian Americans, Jews, women and other groups have been and continue to be victims of stereotypical misrepresentation. One research report about the representations of Latinos shows that there is a significant underrepresentation of not only Latinos but also Asian Americans, Middle Eastern Americans, and Native Americans in Hollywood.\(^{38}\)

The second problem is the implicit assertion that Hollywood is simply bad because it promotes these misrepresentations. This kind of perception lacks a nuanced discussion of Hollywood’s positive influence. Apart from being a channel of entertainment, Hollywood has promoted social responsibility and engaged people to help others in distress.\(^{39}\) Moreover, Hollywood has created high-grossing films starring A-List celebrities showing positive representations of Arabs. In a broadcasted interview, Larry Michalak, a Middle East specialist from the University of California, Berkeley, talked about the “Improvement in Images of Arabs
and Muslims in Recent American Cinema.” Michalak has investigated 23 films and identified several positive films that appeared after 9/11. While the negative portrayal of Arabs or other groups in the media are undeniable in a variety of features, positive depictions defy the negative outcomes of stereotyping and show that the representations are not always biased. The improvement in the Arabs’ representations started before 9/11 in several major films such as *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (1991) and *The 13th Warrior* (1999).

Hollywood’s use of films to promote admired traits in Arabs is apparent in *Robin Hood*. In the movie, Robin saves the life of an Arab named Azeem after both men had been captured by Turks during the Crusades. They escape back to England and Azeem remains with Robin until he repays him for saving his life by serving him. Azeem appears throughout the film as a talented, honorable, positive companion, as well as an intelligent man who possesses scientific knowledge. The positive portrayal of Azeem is an interesting one. Not only does it present positive images of Arabs, but also it shows that a relationship between the East and the West, as embodied in the companionship between Azeem and Robin Hood, can be successful and positive.

Another important, positive representation of Arabs appeared in *The 13th Warrior*, a story about an Arabic traveler, Ahmad ibn Fadlan, who is recruited to serve as the thirteenth member of a group of warriors that go on a quest to help a king whose kingdom is under attack. Ahmad ibn Fadlan is represented as an educated, noble, elegant, smart, and courageous man. This positive portrayal of Arabs is made possible through a focus on ordinary likeable Arab characters and the way their commonplace worries and hopes have been emphasized. Even if the number of Hollywood films presenting a less biased portrayal of Arabs is very small, one cannot ignore this aspect and label Hollywood as simply “bad.”
2. **The Attribution/Causality Theory**

Another important element in the study of stereotypes is Attribution Theory, which Susan Fiske and Shelley E. Taylor define as the following: “Attribution theory deals with how the social perceiver uses information to arrive at causal explanations for events. It examines what information is gathered and how it is combined to form a causal judgment.” When we judge others, we either blame the person (dispositional/internal attribution) or we blame the situation (situational attribution). Dispositional attribution is the belief that an individual's behavior is predisposed by his or her internal and personal characteristics (age, gender, nationality, race, personality, beliefs, attitude, etc.) For example, failure by a woman in a field and violence by black men or creativity by a white man are attributed to internal factors of gender and race. Situational attribution refers to the process of attributing a person's action or behavior to external forces, the situation that he or she is in. For example, people may ascribe success by a woman or professionalism by a black man to external causes such as money or extrinsic motivation. The two kinds of attribution create a dispositional or situational judgment for stereotyping accordingly.

Given that stereotyping is theoretically linked to the tendency to attribute dispositional factors for explaining negative behaviors of outgroup members, the understanding of attribution theory is significant in this project because it looks at how individuals make sense of their world: what cause inferences that they make about the behaviors of others. Such understanding yields the ability to identify the faulty attribution an individual makes and provides the observer with knowledge of environmental factors that can help reduce stereotypes and prejudice. Literature can help reduce bias toward outgroups when it is used as a tool to train readers to strengthen situational attribution for outgroup negative behaviors rather than make judgments. For example,
knowing the causes of anti-American sentiments in the Middle East gives us a better sense of the behaviors.

To elaborate on this topic, one may draw on an important example from recent history. In 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. When Iraq refused the U.N. demands to back down, a coalition led by the United States, joined by other countries, was set in motion, and the Iraqi forces were defeated. As a result, Iraq’s economic infrastructure was severely damaged and many civilians were left dead. Despite the fact that many Arab governments supported the coalition and believed that the United States promoted an appropriate balance of power in the region, many others were drawn to Iraq’s divergent view of the Gulf War. In their study, Daniel Heradstveit and Matthew Bonham show that many Arabs believe that the main motive for the war was not the liberation of Kuwait but rather the crushing of Iraq as a nation, serving America’s geopolitical ambition in the region. In the same study, many Arabs claimed that the United States wanted “secure the oil resources of the Gulf” establishing “a direct military and political presence in an area of great economic significance.” These perceptions create ingroup-outgroup differences (anti-America/anti-Arab sentiments) that lead to the emergence of behaviors, actions, and attitudes that serve to emphasize one’s identity and create hostility toward others.

3. **Ingroup Favoritism and Maintaining Self Identity**

When discussing stereotypes, another important element is how stereotypes bolster the identity of the ingroup by creating a distinction between one’s own group and outgroup. This distinction creates a social problem because it leads to the emergence of ingroup-outgroup bias. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) assumes that individuals attempt to maintain a positive perception of their groups by ascribing positive traits to their group and negative ones to
outgroups, and they implicitly assert that these negative traits are distinctive of those groups (distinctiveness). Because stereotypes seem to be related to group memberships, conflicts between groups are likely to emerge. Schneider writes, “We seem to have stronger and more negative stereotypes about groups to which we do not belong than to those to which we do” (230). The tendency to favor one’s own group (ingroup favoritism) and derogate other groups (outgroup derogation) is evident in intergroup relations. Many studies (e.g., Abrams & Hogg 1988; Vignoles & Moncaster (2007); Bernhard, Fehr, & Fischbacher (2006); Goette, Huffman, & Meier (2006); Guth, Levati, & Ploner (2008).) have documented people’s tendency to “automatically associate positive characteristics with their ingroups more easily than outgroups …as well as their tendency to associate negative characteristics with outgroups more easily than ingroups.” These associations lead to having feelings of pride and superiority for ingroups and sentiments of inferiority for outgroups.

Such ingroup favoritism, as Schneider points out, has been constant throughout recorded history (230). For example, the Old Testament has many references to the Hebrews being the chosen ones and the ancient Greek people labeled whoever did not speak the Greek “barbarians”. In the present day, the Sectarian conflict in the Middle East between Sunni and Shia groups highlights issues of ingroup favoritism. Marilyn Brewer records, "Ultimately, many forms of discrimination and bias may develop not because outgroups are hated, but because positive emotions such as admiration, sympathy, and trust are reserved for the ingroup.” Moreover, not only is the tendency of people to favor their own group found in cultures around the world, but in extreme cases, the ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation can escalate resulting in wars and deaths.
Learning the effects of ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation is crucial to helping understand how literature might work to propose alternative mechanisms. Readers’ schemas can be modified in ways that help them correct the attribution of a group’s disliked traits (negative stereotypes), a group’s negative evaluations (prejudice), and negative behavior toward ingroup and outgroup targets (discrimination). The correction of these harmful elements entails assimilation of the self into an outgroup’s category prototype. Such assimilation requires the elicitation of readers’ empathy to direct their attention to positive traits of outgroups in order to generate positive sentiments toward them. Achieving these objectives is not easy due to the problem with ingroup favoritism, which can be characterized by the absence of positive sentiments rather than the presence of negative attitudes towards outgroups. This problem and its effects can be explained by an important potential factor: the lack of familiarity with outgroups. Most people know more about their group than they do about outgroups, and are therefore unaware of the similarity that may exist between ingroup and outgroup members. The favoritism toward the ingroup that leads to the negative stereotyping of outgroups can be ameliorated through carefully crafted literature when one connects the two groups and presents positive sentiments about both of them as well as others in order to help reduce the prejudices and focus on similarity rather than distinctness.

**Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Discrimination**

So far, we have seen that we all hold beliefs about individuals or groups of people with whom we observe. According to Moskowitz, even a stranger is seen as belonging to a certain group (439). These beliefs come from prior experiences. The beliefs are adapted from our interactions with parents, teachers, and religious people, and media. If we learn about a particular group from school, we create beliefs that can help us perceive the other in an expected manner.
Moskowitz states that the “information gathered from these experiences provides for us expectancies—a set of probable actions and attitudes we can anticipate in others” (439). Hence, stereotypes create expectancies about an Arab, or a group of Arabs. We have observed that the most basic process in stereotyping is categorization. If an American encounters an Arab, he will employ categorization and create inferences about Arabs. Distinct features of Arabs, of which they had previously perceived, activate these categories and in turn may create bias in interactions with them.

When discussing stereotypes, it is important to examine their relationship to prejudice and discrimination. These concepts are closely related because stereotypes can give rise to prejudice that in turn can create discrimination. Prejudice is often seen as a “faulty negative judgment held about members of a group” (Brown 33). We are concerned with the kind of prejudice that often takes a destructive form (harassment, hate crimes, genocide). The difference between stereotypes and prejudice is that the latter has an emotional component. Prejudice can involve negative feelings and attitudes in contrast to stereotypes that include thoughts or beliefs.

Stereotypes and prejudice create a major social problem when they lead to discriminatory behaviors. The concept of social discrimination simply means rejecting members of a group based on their group membership—age, race, religion, color, etc. (Schneider 291). Stereotypes do cause damage when they foster invidious social discrimination. Research shows that some people engage in negative behaviors toward others, and those behaviors influence hiring decisions (Glick, Zion, & Nelson 1988) or give harsher judgments (Bodenhausen & Lichtenstein 1987). If people are led to believe that a certain group has limitations, they may put members of that group at a disadvantage as a result of their group membership. Discrimination can be individual (e.g., a director who refuses to hire a female employee), institutional (an institution
that has policies against some groups), or cultural (unfair treatment of individuals based on their culture). Although discrimination can take several forms (individual, institutional, cultural), it is problematic because it makes people biased against individuals who are outside of their own social group.

In sum, people may exhibit biases that create distinctions among social groups and promote unfair treatment of individuals due to group membership. These three concepts include not only the denial of people’s equality of treatment, but also the favoring of one’s own group (ingroup favoritism) that directly harms or disadvantages another group (outgroup derogation). In order to reduce bias in an effective and generalizable way, one must understand the relationship among stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination. Carefully crafted narratives can offer effective strategies for reducing bias and improve relations between groups. The framework under which literature promotes such changes requires eliciting readers’ empathy and directing their attention to the common humanity that they share with characters who represent outgroup members. The establishment of such a framework can reduce stereotypes and prejudice and obstruct discrimination.

**The Formation of Stereotyping: the Concept of Social Categorization**

We have seen that the function of stereotypes is not merely to ascribe certain traits to the stereotyped groups. It includes the favoring–derogating asymmetry, supporting self-identity, and creating a dispositional/situational judgment, and we have seen how stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination are linked. Having said all that, one might ask how stereotypes are formed. Since stereotypes are beliefs about groups of people, these beliefs are the outcome of individual cognitive functioning. The most important process in cognitive functioning is categorization. Hamilton and Troiler state that “we categorize people into groups as a means of reducing the
amount of information we must contend with” (128). Stereotyping arises from a categorization process. Schneider explains that “before stereotyping can take place, an individual must be seen as a member of one or more categories to which stereotypes may apply” (64). As we categorize objects into different types—apple into the fruit category—we categorize people according to their group memberships (e.g., Blacks, doctors, Arabs, Catholics).

Social categorization is natural, spontaneous, and so important that people are unlikely to do without it (Stangor 2). Shelly Taylor and her colleagues demonstrated in one famous experiment how easily and even spontaneously social categorization occurs. In the experiment, college students were shown a slide show of other students (three men and three women) who were talking about how they should publicize a play that they were putting on. Each of the people in the slideshow was making some suggestions about the topic. The statements were controlled and were no better or worse than one other. The participants were asked to pay attention to the statements and later given a quiz that it included a list of the suggestions along with the pictures of the three men and three women. The participants were asked to say which person had made which statement. The results showed that not only were the participants inaccurate, but also they confused the men with the other men and the women with the other women. Taylor and her colleagues concluded that the confusions came as a result of social categorization. The participants spontaneously associated the statements with gender although they were given no instructions to do so.

The research of Taylor shows that people easily use social categorization without realizing that they are doing it. The reason for using social categorization is that it is a useful process. It gives us information about the characteristics of others, assuming that the beliefs about the category are accurate. For example, if you are ill, you may look for a doctor to treat
you because the doctor is part of the category of people who are qualified to treat your illness. Social categorization is basic and apparent when, for example, we categorize Arabs and draw inferences about them that carry either positive or negative connotations. If an individual, for example, encounters a woman wearing a headscarf, he or she is most likely to place her into either the Arab or Muslim category. The act of categorization is simply the placement of a person in some class of familiar things. A category then creates meaning through activating linked beliefs (Moskowitz 450). In this example, the individual may draw inferences about the woman based on his knowledge of that category. These inferences may be positive, as “she is rich,” or negative, as “she is oppressed.” To explain this process further, Moskowitz writes:

Once categorization has occurred, there is a spreading of activation within the category to all/some of the related components that are linked to (associated with) the stereotype (if one exists). This results in the activation of the stereotype. If the stereotype is activated, there is perceptual readiness…the stereotype is incorporated into the perceiver’s responding, altering the type of judgments, impressions, emotions, and behaviors that are associated with the person being perceived. (452)

Social categorization is, thus, central to human cognition. It allows perceivers to organize and structure their knowledge about the world. However, the construction of this knowledge involves attributing general characteristics to others (stereotyping) that can be negative, which creates a major social problem. Because the process of social categorization and its activation of stereotypes are inevitable, the need for the amelioration of stereotypes is central, so that the association of stereotypes with a social category becomes less problematic. If perceivers learn about a particular group in a positive manner, then the knowledge is stored in
memory in schemas that can be retrieved later when we encounter a member from that group. The linkage between a social category and traits associated with it becomes apparent in our interactions with individuals from any social group.

**The Importance of Schemas**

Stereotypes can be conceptualized by looking at how individuals perceive their environment. Schneider notes that schemas “function as frameworks for understanding what we see and hear” (120). The perceived information is encoded in memory and subsequently retrieved for use in social interactions. To understand how information about social groups is perceived and represented in memory, it is important to discuss schemas. Defined as “an organized representation of knowledge in which the parts are meaningfully related,” schemas play a key role in our understanding of stereotypes and how they can be alleviated (Russel & Broek 345). Schemas are useful because they help us organize and interpret information made available by our environment. In “Schema Criticism: Literature, Cognitive Science, and Social Change” (2011) Mark Bracher suggests that schemas are “essential to our functioning in the world; they are what enable us to quickly identify and appropriately respond to people, objects, and events” (89). However, these schemas can “distort our perception and understanding,” Bracher goes on to explain, “by causing us to ignore important information, falsely infer or suppose facts that do not exist, or connect or dissociate bits of information in tendentious, flawed, and harmful ways” (89). Schemas are representations of memory that are essential and useful when they provide helpful information about an object or an event, and problematic when they fail to do so.

Schemas can be classified into different types: self-schemas, role schemas, and event schemas (scripts). Self-schemas are the knowledge we have about ourselves. They include
thoughts about ourselves that represent our values, beliefs, aspiration, and behaviors. Statements such as “I’m intelligent,” “I’m a great teacher,” and “I’m healthy” are generated because they are abstracted from the present situation and past experiences. Role schemas refer to the knowledge we have about the roles, norms, and expected behaviors associated with a category (gender, race, occupation, etc.) For example, the role of a teacher is to provide quality education, interact with students, and attend professional development sessions. When a series of behaviors or actions is expected in a particular situation or environment, we call this process a script, just like a movie script. People learn from prior experiences and use those experiences to construct scripts that make things easier for them cognitively. Rowell Huesmann states that, “a script serves as a guide for behavior by laying put the sequence of events that one believes are likely to happen and the behaviors that one believes are possible or appropriate for a particular situation” (80).

An understanding of these three types (self-schemas, role schemas, and scripts) is important because it helps one learn a variety of ways in which information provided by our life experiences is used in everyday life. The information embodied in these kinds of schemas is stored in memory so that it can be retrieved in future encounters. This project focuses on the effectiveness of event schemas (scripts) in constructing useful experiences about the world. The establishment of cognitive scripts can be acquired from events and stories in fictional narratives. Literature can provide a mental framework for organizing useful information about outgroup members and relating many positive attributes that will eventually help reduce negative stereotypes and prejudice against a marginalized group.

routines (89). An exemplar is a specific instance of people or events (89). For example, Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, and Larry Bird are representatives of the (basketball player) category. A prototype is “a representation detailing a typical category member, summarized by the set of most common features that are most probable to be found in a category member” (Moskowitz 164). A basketball player tends to be very tall, make quick moves, and jump very high. These features within the category (the basketball player category) are not applicable to all members but they are typical, or likely characteristics derived from experiences.51

Information-processing routines are, according to Bracher, “a form of procedural knowledge that, like other instances of procedural knowledge such as those involved in playing a musical instrument or driving a car, operate largely automatically and outside of awareness” (“Schema Criticism” 89). Our minds take in information, such as how to ride a bicycle or make coffee, and organize it so it can be retrieved later. This system can be divided into three important stages. The first stage is information registration, which means that a certain amount of information enters into the system. Second, the registered information makes contact with previously acquired knowledge, pattern recognition creating a meaning. Finally, after the recognition of pattern, the resulting information can be sent on to short-term memory, which can be maintained indefinitely by recycling material over and over (rehearsal).52 A basic premise of information-processing routines in literature is that readers’ attitudes can be improved through their understanding and interpretation of cues in a literary work. However, in order to use information-processing routines effectively, the integration of emotion is crucial. Emotions play a key role in information processing when they provide direction for readers’ cognitive processes in ways that reduce stereotypes.
In order to see how schemas can be used to enhance our understanding of Arabs, we have to look at the ways in which information is processed. Schneider identifies four stages for this process: (1) attention, (2) labeling and interpretation, (3) memory, and (4) inferences (123).

Suppose a non-Arab individual (for example, John) first develops a schema for Arab men, i.e., they are rich, dangerous, greedy, etc. Now, when John encounters an Arab man for the first time (Hani), John’s attention, which is driven by prior experiences, is directed to Hani. Once the attention has been directed, John might initially label Hani (putting him in one or several categories) and interpret his behavior accordingly. For example, if Hani holds a bag and looks lost, John might see that as a sign of danger. The schemas John uses in his interpretations affect his memory of Hani. John would not remember all of his preconceived ideas about Arabs (that they are rich, for instance), but recalls only what is consistent with the schemas used (here as being dangerous). Finally, the knowledge John has about Arabs (existing schemas) makes the former draw inferences about Hani. The information process here depends entirely on the kinds of schemas John uses. If he perceives Hani positively, his interpretations of Hani will be positive.

The three forms of knowledge are constantly activated as we encounter individual events in our everyday life and the schematic representations of these events can be seen as components of one or more coherent episodes (Russel & Broek 345). Basically, schemas constitute a mechanism through which we can not only acquire new knowledge, but also modify or change old knowledge. If the schema is faulty, new schemas can be developed, and old schemas can be changed or altered. In the past few decades, there has been increased attention regarding schemas and how to correct them or replace them with alternative ones.  

53 Cognitive therapists, for example, have used this approach as a clinical method in treating people with personality disorders.  

54 Christine Padesky states that a person who has a lifelong depression due to
childhood abuse, familial death, or multiple failure experiences would develop negative schemas such as “I am no good.” To overcome depression, this person needs to make changes in her/his cognitive schemas. Weakening the old negative schema and constructing a new positive one can treat the patient. Adopting such an approach in literature can credit positive results when readers’ faulty schemas about social groups are weakened and positive schemas are fashioned.

Through literature, one’s existing faulty schemas that contain negative knowledge about Arabs can be weakened or modified, and new knowledge can be acquired. However, the problem with people who hold negative attitudes and animosity towards Arabs is that they often do not have an alternative schema available that can improve their attitudes. An alternative schema, the desired one, must be developed first so that the stereotyper can change his/her negative attitudes and beliefs towards Arabs. Arabic literature can accomplish the dual goals of weakening the schemas that contain negative knowledge about Arabs and constructing adequate schemas with positive knowledge. Again the central power of literature resides in emotions. Aaron Beck records that schemas and emotions are closely joined (288). A change in schema thus involves focusing on emotions to weaken old schemas and construct new ones. Achieving a change in the structure of schemas leads to achieving change in the person’s/reader’s attitudes and behaviors.

**Stereotypes Change: A Look At Scholars’ Solutions**

Stereotypes can be pernicious and apparent in everyday life. While they are easy to create, the eradication of stereotypes is difficult. Schneider notes that changing stereotypes can be very hard (379). However, that does not mean we give up, but rather we need to understand that changing stereotypes is going to be a difficult task. Using literature as a tool for reducing stereotypes and prejudice, as well as for improving people’s perception of outgroup members, can be a difficult, yet not impossible, task. In spite of this challenge, stereotypes do change as
people differ from generation to generation. Over time changes occur in the political, social, and cultural aspects of society too. For example, in the past few decades, the amount of gender stereotyping has decreased; stereotypes of African Americans have become less negative, and attitudes toward people with mental illness have improved (Schneider 380). Another example is the dramatic change of attitudes towards homosexuals. For instance, Kevin Drum points out that support for same-sex marriage has escalated over the years. Therefore, it is fair to declare that these examples and many others give a reason for optimism.

As for the stereotypes of Arabs, the existence of numerous features in which Arabs have been portrayed in a negative light makes the job of changing stereotypes very challenging. Shaheen declares, “The time is long overdue for Hollywood to end its undeclared war on Arabs, and to cease misrepresenting and maligning them” (Reel Bad Arabs 34). Nevertheless, one cannot afford to be discouraged from attempting to alleviate the stereotypes of Arabs. Because research has shown that literature “models life, comments on life, and help us understand life” (Mar & Oately 173), and it trains us to extend our understanding toward other people, this project attempts to show that literature, through incorporating research on stereotype reduction found in cognitive science, offers a vessel through which stereotype acceptance can be reduced. Moreover, through discussing Men in the Sun and They Die Strangers, this project explores how the promotion of Arabic literature can help dismantle the negative stereotyping of Arabs in American media by drawing on the existing scholarly research on the empathetic function of literature.

Apart from Shaheen’s research, little attention has been given finding solutions to the stereotypes of Arabs. Most scholars have only attempted to expose the misrepresentations of Arabs in American cinema and television and show their consistency. After his dissection of a
disparaging history of Hollywood’s Arab stereotypes, Shaheen explains what can be done to change this state of affairs. First, Shaheen pleads to Hollywood to be “even-handed, to project Arabs as they do other people – no better, no worse” (Reel Bad Arabs 35). Shaheen calls for the inclusion of positive and ordinary Arabs into television and film. However, the solution Shaheen proposes suggests that Hollywood’s denigration of Arabs is mainly the result of an unawareness of positive Arab characters. As suggested earlier, many positive stereotypes of Arabs are shown in many features. If so, the solution cannot be simply replacing the ignorance with a better understanding of Arabs. Media, as an industry, aim at gaining profits even if they manufacture what might distress some people. Paul Martin Lester writes that “media are essentially businesses, and as economics teaches us, business is an amoral enterprise committed to the singular purpose of maximizing profits” (15). Moreover, Schneider states that media cannot be thought of as an effective tool by which audiences insert what they desire to see because the media would only consider what they are willing to support (416). Hence, pleading to Hollywood to present counterstereotypical images of Arabs is not enough.

The need for people’s efforts to challenge stereotypes is important. Shaheen states that Arabs should track the stereotypes down and refashion them as other groups—women, Italians, gays, etc.—have done (Guilty 55). Shaheen claims that voices from those groups spoke out to challenge demeaning stereotypes, and organizations acted forcefully against discriminatory images, resulting in Hollywood getting rid of many racial stereotypes (55). However, many Arabic voices have been contesting negative stereotypes for a long time. Scholars such Said, Alsultani, and Shaheen himself have exposed those stereotypes and talked abundantly about their harm. Moreover, organizations such the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), and the Reclaiming Identity:
Dismantling Arab Stereotypes website have been “hunting” the stereotypes and advocating for a better understanding of Arabs and Muslims and their cultures.

In a similar vein, engaging in talks with Hollywood’s officials to discuss the representations of Arabs appears to be an effective approach that would reduce the negative images. Shaheen argues that “to ensure stereotypes cease, that depictions reflect the community’s true achievements, and that humane portraits begin shaping the hearts and minds of people around the world, activists need to step forward, creating a constructive dialogue with imagemakers” (57). However, Arab organizations have already been engaging in talks with Hollywood’s officials regarding stereotypes. CAIR’s research team, for example, follows the representations of Arabs in media and addresses them immediately. Recently, CAIR asked reviewers to address stereotyping of Arab and Muslim culture in the new TV show “Tyrant” and requested a meeting with network officials to discuss potential stereotypes in the series.\(^{58}\) Notwithstanding this, the negative images of Arabs continue regardless of critics. Shaheen’s call for exposing the stereotypes of Arabs and talking to Hollywood’s officials has thus far proven to be ineffectual.

Finally, talking about the stereotypes of Arabs and providing alternative relatable images may lead to stereotype and prejudice reduction accordingly. In this sense, Shaheen encourages people of influence—teachers, civil rights activists, diplomats, scholars, etc.—to speak up about the stereotypes and discuss positive Arab images (69). Shaheen states that he has spoken about positive Arab images in more than 100 universities around the globe (69). Speaking about Arabs and their contribution to the world is a good starting point for changing stereotypes, but the problem with this solution is that these talks may only selectively present counterstereotypic exemplars, and those people of influence cannot present a full range of positive behaviors and
characteristics of Arabs. What they can bestow is simply information about the accomplishments of Arabs—for example, that they created algebra, mapped the world, and advanced medicine—leaving out other characteristics such as being committed, loyal, good listeners, patient, dependable, etc. Moreover, research has shown that we cannot depend on such methods to undo the damages of stereotyping. Schneider affirms that such methods are likely to go past the very people we must want to change (416). For example, an anti-Arab would not want to attend conferences that discuss Arabs’ accomplishments.

Getting to know other groups through interaction is a method of creating change that has been studied in depth by social psychologists. A substantial body of research has addressed the “contact hypothesis” which posits that contact between groups—for example, in integrated schools—can reduce stereotypes. The main principle in the contact hypothesis states “the best way to reduce tension and hostility between groups is to bring them into contact with each other” (Robinson 181). Given that people from the different groups have mutually positive experiences from interaction, contact is seen an effective approach in stereotypes reduction. There are three basic assumptions prompting this approach:

First is the idea that stereotypes are basically false because of limited experiences.
Second, the contact hypothesis assumes that experiences with individuals from stereotyped groups will provide clear evidence that disconfirms the stereotypes.
And third, it assumes that people will recognize that their own stereotypes are fraudulent and be willing and able to change them. (Schneider 382)

Schneider claims that getting to know one another does not suffice for direct generalizations. Moreover, empirical studies have yielded unpromising results regarding the contact approach. One study, for example, shows that prejudice even increased following the
integration of 1,800 children in a Californian single school. Other research shows that integration is linked to lower self-esteem.

Yet, using the contact approach to reduce prejudice and animosity toward Arabs is not always effective. Presently, more than 3.5 million second- and third-generation Arab Americans live in the United States. Arab Americans live in all 50 states, and approximately 94% of them reside in the top five metropolitan areas: Los Angeles, Detroit, New York/NJ, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. The majority of Arab Americans are Christian. As other ethnic minorities do in the U.S., Arab Americans preserve their cultural identities, such as language, dress, food, beliefs, and values. Even though they socialize with Americans in their everyday life and celebrate many religious and cultural holidays like Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July, negative stereotypes of Arabs have blossomed in American popular culture. In its report “Caught in the Crossfire”, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) asserts that prejudice against Arabs is not only seen in the media, but also in public backlash against their stores through the years and in the hundreds of hate crimes committed against Arab Americans. Therefore, one must look beyond such an approach to find solutions that can effectively reduce the damage caused by negative stereotypes.

**Stereotype Change: Evidence from Cognitive Science**

Over the past decades, social psychologists have attempted to study the ways to reduce the formation and utilization of stereotypes when perceiving, judging, and responding to other people. Promoting interpersonal contact among members of high-and low-status groups (the contact hypothesis discussed above) has been the central intervention, but other approaches aimed at alleviating stereotypes and prejudice have been seen as effective as well.
To test whether negative attitudes can be modified, Dasgupta and Greenwald (2001) provide empirical evidence that attempts to change the social context that people inhabit and reduce automatic prejudice and preference that create bias. The experiments demonstrated that bias against historically stigmatized groups such as African Americans might be modified by repeatedly reminding people of admired members of those groups and of disliked members of high-status reference groups. In their experiment, participants, all students, were shown pictures of illustrious African Americans like Martin Luther King Jr. and notorious European Americans like serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer (exemplars). They were then asked to complete a test in which they categorized four types of stimuli: black names, white names, pleasant words, and unpleasant words. Results reveal that racial bias can be reduced when such exemplars are made salient.

Although stereotyping and prejudice have been viewed as inescapable automatic processes that occur despite deliberate attempts to bypass or ignore them, Dasgupta & Greenwald’s findings show that prejudice and preference may be malleable because people’s attitude towards marginalized groups can be modified when the social context which people inhabit is changed.

Even if stereotype activation occurs automatically, research has also found that it can be overcome through extensive training and mindset priming. Sassenberg & Moskowitz (2005) claim that an intervention can be built on a mindset that is activated easily in individuals who are primed with creativity. In this mindset, a person refrains from the typical associations with one’s stereotypes. In their study, participants in both mindsets (thoughtful and creative mindsets) addressed topics such as term papers and preparation for exams, problem solving and planning in several domains, social situations, and handicraft work. Topics such as important decisions, shopping, and traveling were exclusively discussed in the thoughtfulness mindset while topics such as art work, performing art, and cooking were only mentioned in the creative mindset.
Participants were either primed with creativity or thoughtfulness by researchers asking them to report three situations in which they had behaved creatively or thoughtfully. The results indicated that by activating those particular representations in memory just before carrying out a task, stereotypes are less likely to be triggered afterward. Sassenberg & Moskowitz state that stereotypes are “less likely activated when counterstereotypic exemplars are made accessible by mental imagery” (506). This strategy is significant because it shows that with learning, the activation of stereotypes is less likely to occur. Therefore, literature, which has the ability to expose its readers to members of stereotyped groups, may train readers to reduce the accessibility of harmful stereotypic contents.

Another strategy that has been found to reduce the formation and utilization of stereotypes is Situational Attribution Training (SAT). Stewart et al. believe that people tend to attribute the negative behaviors of outgroup members to dispositional factors (internal causes such as character deficiency, poor upbringing, and genetics) rather than to external factors (221). This phenomenon is called Ultimate Attribution Error (UAE). Stewart et al. argue that by training people extensively to make situational rather than dispositional explanations for outgroup members’ negative stereotype-consistent behaviors, automatic stereotyping can be reduced. In their study, White undergraduates were taught over time to choose situational explanations over dispositional explanations for negative behaviors in black men. Stewart et al. contend that extensive training aimed at “considering the situation” when judging negative behaviors of outgroup members reduces activation of negative stereotypes associated with those members (224). The understanding of this procedure is crucial in order to yield a more comprehensive approach under which literature can perform positive transformative abilities in people’s attitudes. Fictional narratives can correct people’s faulty attribution by directing
attention to the situations of the characters rather than internal forces. To use this strategy in literature effectively, training readers to make correct judgments towards outgroup members requires the use of emotions as a motivational force.

Moreover, research shows that replacing essentialist implicit person-theories (entity theory) with incremental theory can reduce stereotyping. Some people accept that the fundamental character and competence of humans tends to be fixed, not malleable. Other people believe the core character is not fixed (malleable), but can evolve over time, called an incremental theory. An intervention teaching an incremental theory can promote positive change in people’s attitudes. Based on this premise, educating readers of literature about the faulty theory of the immutability of human attributes can alleviate group stereotypes.

Finally, using a priming paradigm to correct bias has been found successful. Participants in such studies are exposed to words or images that bring subliminally to mind related ideas or associations concerning a target of prejudice. Then, once an implicit prejudice or stereotype has been triggered, researchers can assess its strength and effect on other attitudes, beliefs, and behavior. In her experiment using this approach, Patricia Devine (1989) made use of the black stereotype as being hostile and aggressive and exposed her subjects to words related to black stereotype (“Negro,” “Harlem,” “slavery,” “athlete,” etc.). Then, people were asked to read a brief scenario about someone named Donald whose race was not identified and whose behaviors were ambiguous in terms of hostility. The subjects were asked to judge the actions of Donald. Devine found that people who had been primed with black stereotypic words later judged the person as relatively more hostile.

Clearly, stereotypes are not resistant to change. The above evidence has indicated how stereotypes can be modified radically and new cognitive structures can be developed to reduce
the formation of stereotypes when perceiving, judging, and responding to other people. The effectiveness of various techniques found in cognitive science shows that with extensive training individuals can reduce prejudice and bias towards others. Similarly, literature can promote transformative possibilities for changing our mental structures—creating new schemas that readers will use. Research shows that literary studies incorporating contemporary cognitive science can prove useful implications for advancing social justice. In “How to Teach for Social Justice: Lessons from Uncle Tom's Cabin and Cognitive Science, and Social Change” (2011) Mark Bracher argues that “the repeated experiences of empathy…[and] the repeated production of accurate appraisals of the Other” in Stowe’s Uncle Tom's Cabin—as well other carefully crafted works—can “alter readers’ habitual feelings and actions toward stigmatized and oppressed people in general by altering the cognitive scripts that produce their perceptions and judgments about such people” (379).

The belief that literature has the capacity to induce empathy for outgroup members and eventually change attitudes is empirically established. Some studies have shown that children’s attitudes toward African-Americans exhibit less bias and prejudice after being exposed to African-American characters in their readings. Other research shows that role taking reduces stereotypes and ingroup favoritism through empathy that allows one to take the perspective of another person. Moreover, empathy induction has been seen as one of the effective strategies found in cognitive science to reduce stereotypes. Research shows that feeling empathy for one or a few members of a stigmatized group reduces stereotypes. In their experiments, Batson et al. show that inducing empathy for a young woman with AIDS or the homeless led to more positive attitudes toward people affected by AIDS or homelessness. For instance, participants listened to an interview tape where a young woman with AIDS talked about her life since she learned she
was HIV positive. The woman’s emotional experience induced empathy in listeners, which improved their attitudes towards people with AIDS.69

Not only does feeling empathy improve attitudes toward stigmatized groups but it also increases understanding and eventually helps the group in question. Batson and other scholars write “inducing empathy for a member of a stigmatized group increases the desire to help the group as a whole” (“Empathy, Attitudes, and Action” 1662). Empathic feelings have been observed both when participants were led to believe that a member of a stigmatized group was real and when they thought that he was fictional.70 These studies show that individuals who are exposed to fictional narratives tend to exhibit significant empathetic growth and less prejudice. Therefore, in this project, the provisions of carefully crafted Arabic narratives not only serve to alleviate prejudice on an emotional level, but also develop the capacity to be empathetic.

Integrating Stereotypes, Schemas, and Empathy in Literature: How the Damage Caused by Stereotypes Can Be Reduced

Exposing negative images is not enough, however, when studying the stereotypes of a social group in popular culture. One must look at the other elements discussed above to show the real danger of stereotypes. The ascription of negative images to the serotyped group is harmful indeed. However, the tendency to attribute one’s actions or behaviors to internal causes (internal causation) rather than external forces (external causation), the enhancement of one’s own group (ingroup favoritism) and the derogation of outgroups (outgroup derogation) to enhance one’s own group identity, and the implicit assertion that these negative images are distinctive of the stereotyped group (distinctiveness) are far more damaging. To mitigate the damage caused by stereotypes, these elements need to be fully challenged, and, thus, alter individuals’ faulty schemas. In “Effective Strategies for Social Justice Pedagogy” Mark Bracher argues that
“correcting these faulty attributions of superiority, distinctiveness, and internal causality regarding negative traits is more important than correcting faulty ascription of negative traits themselves” (5). Literary studies has the power to correct these elements through the examination of positive traits and the treatment of the faulty theories of causality, distinctiveness, and favoritism, and, hence, change the three forms of knowledge—exemplars, prototypes, and information-processing routines—that constitute individuals’ schemas. Literature powerfully offers elements that alter individuals’ cognition of others. In Educating for Cosmopolitanism: Lessons from Cognitive Science and Literature (2013) Mark Bracher argues, “Literature, unique among discourses in this regard, engages readers in …schema-altering processes” (21).

Because of its power to facilitate an understanding of others, literature is an effective, instructive tool that can be used to promote positive change in people’s attitudes. The utilization of such a tool involves the integration of stereotypes, schemas, and empathy. Since stereotypes are beliefs, they are stored in memory in cognitive representations (schemas) that contain connections between a social category and traits associated with that category. The schemas that include exemplars, prototypes, and information-processing routines can be thought of as types of prejudgment, as Mark Bracher notes in “Schema Criticism” (2011) that “can function to exclude, distort, or even fabricate crucial information about other people” (89). When we meet a person from a particular group our cognitive schemas are triggered in order to perceive that particular person. These three forms of knowledge are important to explore in this project because literature can serve as a mechanism through which one or all forms can be used. For instance, an Arabic literary character (exemplar) may serve as an ideal model that eventually enhances readers’ perceptions of Arabs. Moreover, positive characteristics of various Arabic characters (prototype) in one novel or several others may function as a cognitive representation of the Arabs.
category. Finally, through absorbing literature, readers can repeatedly engage in cognitive activities that lead them to develop adequate information-processing routines.

Similar to stereotypes, empathy includes processes that can provide information about behaviors and underlying mental states of others. While the cognitive processes embedded in stereotypes are concerned with knowledge, empathy is about motivation that can provide direction for cognitive processes (Ekman, Paul, & Davidson 240). The integration of empathy and social change has been gaining empirical support. This project aims to offer a model of stereotype reduction and attitude change (see Figure 1) that is theoretically coherently enough to show how the understanding of carefully crafted Arabic literature influences the readers’ behavior positively. The model begins when readers attend to, encode, and interpret cues embedded in the literary work. Encoding and interpreting cues (emotional arousal) can result in a change of the reader’s attitudes (Crick & Ladd 246). Given the capabilities of literature, the given diagram illustrates how literature and cognitive science can be integrated.

First, literature induces empathy in readers through direct association, role taking, and emotional contagion. As a critical ingredient in attitude change, emotions can enhance readers’ perception and motivate them to alter existing faulty judgments of Arabs. After the readers’ empathetic responses are elicited, their cognitive processes can be directed to form more adequate schemas and replace the faulty ones. There are three processes in which readers of literature can be engaged so the desired change can be achieved. The first process is the provision of positive knowledge—which can be done through the use of literature as a means for offering accepted and positive exemplars, prototypes, and information-processing routines.
Reducing Stereotypes Harm/Weakening Faulty Schemas

Correcting Attribution Error
Reducing Ingroup-Outgroup Bias
Correcting Distinctiveness

Constructing Adequate Schemas

Exemplars
Prototypes
Information Processing Routines

Direct Association

Role Taking

Inducing Empathy

Emotional Contagion

Providing Positive Knowledge
Engaging in Multiple Repetitions

Figure 1. What Literature Can Do
However, it is important to note that it is not enough to develop schemas that include positive and powerful exemplars, prototypes, and information-processing routines in order to seek the desired change. Readers need to be engaged repeatedly with these forms (in this second process) so the old faulty ones are no longer cued. To show how the repetition of these processes is important, Bracher writes in “Schema Criticism,” “The more experiences one has of eschewing the exemplars, prototypes, and processing routines of the old, faulty schema and activating instead the elements of the new, more adequate schema, the more power and automatic the new, more adequate schema becomes”(95). For example, a literary work that provides a single Arabic exemplar is not sufficient to challenge wrong Arabic exemplars. Multiple admired exemplars are needed so readers can form adequate and powerful schemas that can weaken or replace the harmful ones and produce others (the third process) that promote a positive understanding of Arabs.

Finally, after these repetitions, the faulty schemas can be weakened and new desired ones can be cued automatically. The new schemas can be more prevailing if all elements of the stereotypes are corrected. For example, if Arabic literature provides new schemas that contain corrections of the faulty theories of distinction, causal attribution, and ingroup/outgroup asymmetry as well as positive traits over the negative ones, stereotypes of Arabs can be drastically alleviated. Thus Arabic literature can elicit readers’ emotions for Arabic characters and motivate readers to form more accurate judgments of Arabs and engage them in empathizing with the characters and real Arab people who are suffering. Moreover, Arabic literature can establish new information processing through executing several times the sequence of cognitive acts that constitutes a script.74 The restaurant script—waiting to be seated, getting a menu, giving orders to a server, paying the bill, and so on—is a famous example in social psychology that
illustrates the concept of script. In a similar vein, stereotypes of Arabs often take a script form that has a strong influence on people’s behaviors. For example, suppose you are sitting on a plane when three bearded Arabs get in the plane and sit nearby. A parallel situation is the retrieval of a terrorism script—when the plane is on the air, the three Arabs scream in declaring that they are hijacking the plane and the script could continue. The three men may never hijack the plane and are normal passengers. But the activation of the terrorism script leads you to make negative intent attributions due to bias toward Arabs.

The search of an alternative script to guide attitudes and behaviors towards the desired goal requires creating correct schemas that contain positive exemplars, prototypes, or information-processing routines. Huesmann states: “Each script represents the a sequence of behaviors and expected outcomes or responses of the environment. However the meaning and value of objectively similar outcomes may change depending on one’s schemas about the world” (100). Therefore, literature can be used to construct an appropriate schema about Arabs so it can be retrieved later in social interactions—like the plane script. For example, if the faulty theory of internal causality needs to be corrected, a schema can be formed through directing readers’ attention towards the situations of the Arab characters in the text in order to alter the attribution of causality and allow the readers to make accurate judgments regarding the causes of those characters’ behaviors.

In sum, cognitive science can provide important tools to readers of Arabic literature that help them understand the stereotypes of Arabs and how the harm they can cause be mitigated. Incorporating emotions in the schema concept has broad potential application in literature and for this dissertation. Writers of fictional narratives build an alternative world in which characters are not obscure to readers’ worlds. Mar and Oately state that in literature, authors attempt to
design characters that acquire familiar psychology (185). The perception of this world gives rise to our emotions that are sometimes unrecognizable outside of literature. Oatley remarks that we “do not always recognize our emotions or the emotions of others, but literary fiction can help improve our skills of recognition and understanding” (206). Because literature has the power to foster this emotion recognition, through the pedagogy of carefully crafted Arabic narratives, readers are more likely to develop schemas that eventually lead them to exhibit less bias towards Arabs. Literature, whether Arabic, African, or Spanish, is designed to enable readers to imagine the characters’ problems, worries, and more importantly, their states of emotion. 75 Research shows that the positive effects of empathy stems from “a received interchangeability,” such as the recognition that “I help you because you are me.” 76 Consistent with this point, this project argues that empathy is an important and productive tool that offers a better understanding of the realities of Arabs.

Summary

This chapter has attempted to advance the explanation of the stereotyping of Arabs. In their research on the representations of Arabs in media, many scholars have focused on one element of stereotypes: the ascription of negative images to Arabs. Many books and articles have exposed those negative images and discussed their harm. However, little attention has been paid to the following important components in discussing the portrayals of Arabs in media:

1. That the negative images implicitly support the stereotyper’s identity through ascribing positive traits to the stereotyper’s group (ingroup favoritism) and negative ones to the stereotyped group (outgroup derogation).

2. That these negative images are distinctive of the stereotyped group (distinctiveness).
3. That the actions and behaviors of the stereotyped group tend to be attributed to internal causes rather than to external forces (internal causation).

Also, this chapter has also sought to explain how stereotypes are shaped during processes in which categorization and schema appear as basic concepts. Furthermore, this chapter has shown that the solutions given by scholars to reduce the harm done by the stereotypes of Arabs do not suffice, as the negative images continue in abundance. Yet, one can help to reduce stereotypes by using literature and incorporating elements of cognitive science for promoting positive change in people’s attitude towards others. The key element is emotion. Literature enhances one’s ability to understand other people’s emotions, which makes one ultimately able to transfer that experience into real life situations. Batson writes: “We believe that…[fictional narratives] seek to improve attitude toward a stigmatized group—a racial or cultural minority, people with some social stigma, disability, or disease” (“Empathy and Attitudes” 105). Since empirical studies have shown that empathy inductions have improved racial attitudes as well as attitudes and actions toward people, and since the exposure of admired exemplars has improved people’s attitudes toward stigmatized groups, this project will contend that literature offers all of those conceptual tools needed to improve attitudes toward others.
CHAPTER THREE
REPRESENTATIONS OF ARABS IN MEDIA

Many scholars have focused on the ways in which Arabs have been portrayed in media since the beginning of the twentieth century. Research, however, scarcely scratched the surface of this complex topic of stereotypes. In their investigations, scholars have attempted to show how the stereotypes of Arabs in media have been mostly negative. This chapter aims to show that the study of the stereotypes of Arabs is not only about how American popular culture views Arabs. It requires looking fully at the nature of stereotypes and their implicit dangers for the stereotyped groups. By discussing “Stan of Arabia” and *The Dictator*, this chapter brings to light the harm caused by the negative representations of Arabs. The negative portrayal of Arabs in these two features is not to be dismissed on grounds that they are just entertainment. On the contrary, they are powerful cultural forces that can shape people’s stereotypes about others.

Many minority groups—for example, Blacks, Asians, homosexuals, and Hispanics—are studied by scholars in terms of how American popular culture stereotypes them, and these researchers call for positive representations to counterstereotype the negative images. Similarly, critics have attempted to explain the main reasons behind the repetition of the distorted images of Arabs and the minimal amount of attention given to diverse imagery. Scholars believe that ignorance of Arabs’ beliefs, religions, culture, and literature have led some people to rely on stereotypical forms, including jokes, cartoons, TV commercials, shows, songs, and films as outlets for their false stereotypes. The research of Shaheen shows that many portrayals of Arabs in media have given very little attention to important images of Arabs who are family
members, teachers, students, artists, engineers, neighbors, and who have made great contributions to American society. Those are the real Arabs that should be seen widely across media.

However, this view fails to acknowledge that stereotypes are not arbitrary. They do come from somewhere. Hollywood has not created mythological Arabs and supplied them with completely fabricated images. Said’s *Orientalism* posits that America inherited from Europe the view that Arabs stand in opposition to the West (284). However, this deeply rooted view that helped perpetuate many negative images has been magnified by several major events involving Arabs, such as the murders at the 1972 Olympics in Munich, the 1988 Lockerbie incident (bombing of Pan Am Flight 103), and, most conspicuously, the 9/11 attacks. The media have spread negative stereotypes of Arabs affected by behaviors, attitudes, and actions of Arabs. For example, after the founding of Israel, Arabs opposed the creation of a Jewish state and, thus, were demonized in the media—in features such as *Sirocco* (1951) and *Lost Command* (1966)—and labeled as “anti-Western terrorists” (Little 4). Another important example is that after the murders at the 1972 Olympics and the Arab oil embargo of 1973, Arabs were mainly portrayed as either “brutal thugs or greedy sheikhs” (38). Examples of this negative portrayal occur in movies such as *Black Sunday* (1977), *Back to the Future* (1985), and *Delta Force* (1986).

Even though the stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims (media normally do not distinguish between the two groups) are predominantly negative, observers need to look fully at other elements under which stereotypes do other damage. The ascription of negative images to Arabs is destructive indeed, but other elements of stereotypes are harmful as well. These elements are: attribution of internal factors (causal theory) when describing negative behaviors of others; creation of a distinction between the stereotyper’s own group and the outgroup, favoring his/her
group (ingroup favoritism) and derogating others (outgroup derogation); and finally an assumption that these negative images are unique to particular groups (distinctiveness). The understanding of these problems is crucial to reduce stereotyping and, subsequently, prejudice and discrimination. This chapter provides first a look at how media have portrayed Arabs and then examines closely two features—“Stan of Arabia” and The Dictator—to address the above elements of stereotypes.

**Representations of Arabs in Media**

We live in a world where we are bombarded by media representations. We view these representations everywhere: on television, in movies, in newspapers and magazines, as well as on the Internet. However, the representations we see are often faulty. Schneider notes that there are four ways in which media distort our perceptions of groups: (1) *Underrepresentation*, in which some groups are seen much less than others in media; (2) *Selective presentation*, when a group is presented in certain roles, such as women in home settings; (3) *Stereotypic presentation*, wherein a group may be presented in terms of behaviors, values, and attitudes such as the negative portrayal of psychiatrists in movies as evil manipulators; and (4) *framing* and *priming*, the process of providing easily comprehended contexts for understanding the behaviors of people while excluding either historical or socioeconomic contexts (344-47). These processes are powerful and can affect our attitudes towards others. The understanding of the effect of stereotypic presentation, however, is essential because it is how individuals make generalizations about categories of people—that all individuals from group A always do X, that group B doesn’t do much, or that all people from group A are like X and all people from group B are like Y. As far as Arabs are concerned, images of Arabs are seen everywhere across media. Nisbet, Ostman, and Shanahan note that media have become the primary source of information about Arabs...
However, the prominent images are the negative ones, which are observed in newspapers (Nacos & Torres-Reyna 2007; Semmerling 2008), TV (Alsultany 2012), movies (Shaheen 2001; 2008), children’s literature (Schmidt 2006), and video games (Sisler 2008). Paul Lester writes that “television, movie, and news images of Arabs as villains and terrorists continue in abundance” (62).

Even though there have been some representations that attempt evenhandedness, the negative images of Arabs are omnipresent and continue to appear. Such repetitions serve to place Arabs in a binary opposition with the West. Moreover, research has shown that there are three kinds of representations of Arabs in American media: Simplified-Complex, negative, and positive. The Simplified-Complex Representations—coined by Alsultany (2012)—are the new era of representations that have appeared in order to rationalize practices and discriminatory actions towards Arabs. The Simplified-Complex Representations work through a system that employs strategies such as inserting patriotic Arab or Muslim Americans or sympathizing with the plight of Arab and Muslim Americans after 9/11. This representation appears mainly on TV as an attempt to make prejudice legitimate by presenting a logic that defends the discrimination against Arab Americans as a reasonable practice. This new trend in the representations of Arabs emerged after 9/11. In her research on this new trend, Alsultany examines a sampling of TV dramas such as 24 and Sleeper Cell to display how these dramas reveal a different meaning about Arabs through their narrative context. Alsultany explains that while Arabs in these dramas are depicted as threats to U.S. national security, and because of popular awareness of ethnic stereotyping, the story lines had to be modified by the shows’ writers so that crude stereotyping can be avoided (Arabs and Muslims in the Media after 20). Alsultany laments how a new kind of bias appeared, one that explicitly promotes antiracism and multiculturalism through the
promotion of positive representations but concurrently “produces the logics and affects necessary to legitimize racist policies and practices.” This representational mode attempts to balance a negative representation with a positive one.

Moreover, while TV dramas such as The Practice, NYPD Blue, and Law and Order seem to evoke emotions through focusing on the Arab American plight post-9/11, Arab Americans’ civil rights are not given the same standing as others (Arabs and Muslims in the Media 49). For example, in one episode of The Practice, a white lawyer is hired to defend an airline slogan “We Don’t Fly Arabs”. Alsultany shows how this particular episode does the ideological work of justifying discriminatory policies. While the lawyer states that racial profiling is a terrible thing, Arabs have to deal with it because national security is more important (54). Alsultany refers to many TV shows but emphasizes 24 and Sleeper Cell because their theme centers entirely on the War on Terror. Alsultany contends that these representational strategies “present an important departure from stereotypes into more challenging stories and characters” (26). The positive representations of Arabs have increased to show, as Alsultany argues, that writers are sensitive to negative stereotyping (“Arabs and Muslims in the Media” 163). For example, if an Arab is portrayed in a TV drama as terrorist, then a positive representation of an Arab (such as a patriotic Arab assisting the US government in its fight against terrorism) is normally included “to subvert the stereotype of the terrorist” (163). In sum, in some of TV dramas, representations emerge where Arabs are not entirely demonized. Rather, the creators of those dramas have presented both negative and positive representations that evoke sympathy for Arabs.

The Negative Images of Arabs

The negative representations are countless. Having examined more than 1,000 movies, Shaheen concludes, “a consistent pattern of dehumanization emerges here” (Guilty 25). By using
negative stereotypes, the media impart false beliefs and gain the confidence of the audience when the stereotypes seem to speak of reality and construct credibility. The negative representations of Arabs in the media are not new. They started in movies at the beginning of the twentieth century, and since then, they have spread widely to other forms of media. Several of these movies are as old as cinema, such as *The Palace of Arabian Nights* (1905), which presents a stereotypical image of Arabs—maidens who dance for the pleasure of a bored Arab (Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs* 8). One of the first degrading portrayals of Arabs appeared in E. M. Hull’s *The Sheik* (1921), a film that tells the story of the Lady Diana Mayo who is abducted and raped by an Arab, Sheik Ahmed Ben Hassan. *The Sheik* shows how Arabs are not only brutal, but also lascivious and greedy. Shaheen points to this representation: “When an Arab sees a woman he wants, he takes her” (*Reel Bad Arabs* 15). Another demeaning representation appeared in *Tarzan of the Apes* (1918), where Arabs are portrayed as brutal slave masters whipping African slaves (Shaheen, “The Making” 15). Since then, images of Arabs being racially inferior have become a staple of the American popular culture.84

The negative portrayal of Arabs has been in media for a long time. Shaheen writes that “for more than a century Hollywood… has used repetition as a teaching tool, tutoring audiences by repeating over and over, in film after film, insidious images of the Arab people” (*Reel Bad Arabs* 1). Shaheen claims that in a myriad of films, Arabs are shown as “brute murderers, sleazy rapists, religious fanatics, oil-rich dimwits, and abusers of women” (2). In this documentation, Shaheen identifies five basic Arab types in these movies: villains, Sheikhs, Maidens, Egyptians, and Palestinians. In these films, Arab villains assault everyone, even fellow Arabs and terrorize innocents everywhere. Although the word Sheikh refers to a wise elderly person and can also be used, out of respect, to address a Muslim religious scholar, a Sheikh in Hollywood holds a
different meaning. He is a “stooge-in-sheets, hook-nosed” sovereign who lusts after blondes. Sheikhs were at first depicted as lazy and fat. More recently, they are seen as oily, fabulously wealthy, militant, and usually offensive. The “Maidens” type is the humiliated, eroticized Arab woman who belly dances in potentates’ palaces. Arab women are perceived as subservient and stupid, but also as conniving vamps. Such caricatures of Egyptians have appeared in more than 100 films in which they are associated mostly with mummy tales or scenarios such as the First and Second World Wars. They are often depicted as ignorant, beggars, superstitious, or Nazi supporters. Palestinians are depicted as terrorists killing not only Israelis, but also Americans on U.S. soil. Movies about the Palestinians dehumanize them and disassociate them from their homeland. The comprehensive research of Jack Shaheen explores the countless representations of Arabs in which they have been negatively portrayed. These representations have contributed in generating cultural misconceptions about Arabs.

Similarly, in his examination of six Hollywood movies, Tim Semmerling reveals in his book “Evil” Arabs in American Popular Film: Orientalist Fear that the negative representations have been created as a result of U.S. ideologies at different historical moments from the post-Vietnam War period to 9/11. For example, in his analysis of the movies Black Sunday (1977) and Rollover (1981), Semmerling asserts that the distortion of the images of Arabs in these movies helped stabilize Americans’ feelings of superiority and control that had started to decrease in the aftermath of the 1973 oil embargo. In 1973, Arab oil producers cut off exports to the U.S. to protest American military support for Israel in its 1973 war with Egypt and Syria. This embargo brought increasing gas prices and long lines at filling stations, and it contributed to a major economic downturn in the U.S. While Shaheen basically focuses on the stereotypical images of Arabs that Hollywood has been spreading for over a century, Semmerling studies one reason
behind this ethnic profiling in his close readings of the films and insightful analysis of the visual
tropes and narrative structures that illustrate how Arabs are depicted as attacking American
ideological myths.

On TV, the representations of Arabs have not diverged from those in the mainstream
movies, even though few voices have attempted to explore the representations on TV. After eight
years of television viewing, Shaheen contends that not only has TV perpetuated negative images
of Arabs, but it has also failed to show outstanding Arab personalities (The TV Arab 4-8). TV
has provided the audience with countless images of Arabs as bombers, belly dancers, and villains
(4). These images appear in children’s programs, news, documentaries, and more. Moreover, in
his TV viewing, Michael Suleiman states that Arabs men are usually represented as stupid,
primitive, aggressive, violent, sex-crazed, and unreasonable, and Arab women are represented as
uneducated, oppressed, and docile (35). Similar to movies, the images of Arabs conveyed in
television are often negative.

Acknowledging the Counterexamples

The research of Shaheen and others has shown that there are myriad movies and TV
shows in which Arabs have been negatively represented. These representations in American
media facilitate the stereotypes of Arabs that get ingrained within society and plague everyday
interactions. However, despite the negative depictions, the representations of Arabs in American
media are not all bad. As noted in chapter one, the media has projected Arabs in a positive
manner in many features. Moreover, many extraordinary Arabs have been given a great respect
in media. Such examples are Lebanese poet Khalil Jibran, Palestinian spokeswoman Hanan
Ashrawi, and Queen Rania of Jordan. Also, many Arab Americans have distinguished
themselves in many fields and have been positively recognized in media. Examples are the four-
time U.S. National Chess Champion Yasser Seirawan, the world record holder for the marathon Khalid Khannouchi, America’s foremost consumer advocate Ralph Nader, the well-known literary and social critic Edward Said, the two winners of the Nobel Prize for Chemistry Dr. Ahmed Zewail (a professor of physics at the California Institute of Technology who won the award in 1999) and the 1990 winner from Harvard Dr. Elias Corey. Moreover, many Arab Americans are acting legends and singing stars in media such as Paula Abdul, Salma Hayek, Vince Vaughn, Tony Shalhoub, DJ Khaled (Kalid), and rock legend Frank Zappa. Additionally, a very famous Arab actor who has been given a renowned position in Hollywood is the Egypt-born Omar Sharif who won a Golden Globe award for his outstanding performance in Doctor Zhivago, and an Oscar nomination for his role as Sherif Ali in Lawrence of Arabia.

That said, although mainstream media continue to present a negative portrayal of Arabs, one cannot ignore the above counterexamples that give us a better rendering of Arabs. However, the presence of these counterexamples is not enough to break stereotypes because they are not as many as the negative ones. One problem with stereotypes is the repetition of the negative images and the lack of balanced positive representations in other contexts. Arabs can be presented stereotypically because stereotypes are part of our life. Yet if the perceiver has an access to diverse images, he/she does not have to apply one representation to an entire group of Arabs. Alsultany notes that “If we had a field of representations in which Arabs and Arab Americans were portrayed as fathers, mothers, friends, neighbors, doctors, government officials, artists, kind, generous, as well as evil, greedy, pathological, terroristic, extreme, etc. – as heroes, as villains, as everyday people - then the danger of a repeated image or story would lessen.” Given that literature has the ability to present various characters with positive representations, the stereotypes of Arabs can be alleviated. Nevertheless, as discussed earlier, it is not enough to
address the harm of stereotypes by only exposing the negative images and providing positive ones. The false attribution of stereotypes to internal causes, the distinctiveness of those stereotypes to the stereotyped group, and the ingroup favoritism/outgroup derogation are important elements that need to be tackled and corrected so the dangers of stereotypes can be effectively lessened. A discussion of these elements is offered in the following analysis of the stereotypes of Arabs in “Stan of Arabia” and The Dictator.

**American Stereotypes of Arabs Revisited: Lessons from “Stan of Arabia” and The Dictator**

*Stan of Arabia*

One might say that animated TV shows like *South Park, The Simpsons, Family Guy,* and *American Dad* are meant to be viewed just for fun. However, they can perpetuate stereotypes—whether they are about members of the LGBTQI, Arabs, or other groups. One of the important representations of Arabs in general and of an Arab country in particular, appeared in 2005 in the show *American Dad,* when the series aired a two-episode takedown of Saudi Arabia entitled “Stan of Arabia.” The TV series *American Dad* centers on a CIA agent, Stan Smith, who is always on the alert for terrorist activity to protect his beloved America. Stan is married to a blonde housewife (Francine) and has two children: a feminist teenage daughter (Hayley) and a goofy son (Steve). The Smith family owns two strange nonhumans: Roger, a space alien who loves alcohol, and Klaus, a German-speaking goldfish. Klaus was a German Olympic athlete whose brainwaves were switched with that of a goldfish by the CIA to prevent him from winning the gold medal at the 1986 Winter Olympics. In “Stan of Arabia,” Stan and his associates plan a surprise 25th anniversary for his boss, Bullock. Before the party, Francine and Stan have a fight. She ignores Stan’s demands to help him with organizing the party, and Stan is upset looking at his marriage as an unequal partnership. At the party, Stan kills TV host Jay Leno after the latter
implied that Francine is the man in the relationship. Stan performs a roast—instead of Leno—that goes horribly wrong, and is thrown out. The next day, Bullock relocates Stan and his family to Saudi Arabia as a punishment for what happened at the party.

“Stan of Arabia” presents a myriad of images of Saudi Arabia, most of which are negative. However, it is not enough to expose those images and refute them because these images are based on some empirical reality. As a matter of fact, some of the representations in “Stan of Arabia” are completely true and these include the ban on alcohol, the image of sand and desert, the belief that teenage boys can be considered men in Saudi culture and hold responsibility for their families, the fact that women cannot sing in public, and the illegality of homosexuality in the country. Yet other images of Saudi Arabia appear exaggerated, including the beliefs that in the country, women cannot leave the house unaccompanied by a man, children are violent, women obey everything their husbands say, most Saudis are terrorists. Every country has positive and negative aspects. Just like any other society, Saudi Arabia is not an ideal country without problems.

Even though there is some truth behind most negative images, such images can cause harm when applied to an entire group. According to the May 1998 edition of Psychology Today, Psychologist John Bargh asserts, "Even if there is a kernel of truth in the stereotype, you're still applying a generalization about a group to an individual, which is always incorrect …[and] people should be judged as individuals and not as members of a group." Therefore, the bad stereotypes presented in “Stan of Arabia” seem unfair to Saudis because the latter are individuals who defy such bias. For example, one commonly held stereotype about Saudi Arabia is that women wear veils. Research on the representation of Arabs has revealed how the media have focused on the veil as a symbol of oppression. Although it is true that there are Saudi women
who wear veils, many of them actually do not. Therefore, this perception of Saudi women can be misleading.\footnote{63} There may be some validity to any stereotype, but it is often overgeneralized.

In the beginning, the Smith family seems to like a chance to experience a new culture but Roger goes ballistic when he learns that Saudi Arabia bans alcohol. Meanwhile, Stan receives his new mission: protecting a pipeline that is being built. As Stan and his family adjust to the new culture, the family experiences many things that they find excruciating. In “Stan of Arabia,” Saudi Arabia is supplied with the many stereotypes where the creators repeat, in scene after scene, images of the Saudis that perpetuate the misrepresentations of Arabs that have been going on in media for over decades. From the very beginning of the episode, Saudi Arabia is presented in a very negative manner as Stan is forced to live in the country as a “punishment” for his horrible deeds. The first clip after the Smiths arrive in Saudi Arabia is a cliché image of the Arab land emphasizing sand and desert. Once the family is settled, Stan begins to make commands, but Francine ignores him. Every member of the Smith family engages in a series of actions. Hayley asks her brother to accompany her to the bazaar because apparently, as a woman, she cannot leave the house unaccompanied by a man. Steve is thrilled to know that in the Saudi culture he is considered a man. Later in the episode, the CIA informs Stan that he can have his old job in the U.S. back; he refuses and burns his passport, saying that he likes Saudi Arabia because in this culture the man has the final say on everything. When Francine gets arrested for indecent exposure, Stan visits her in jail and is frightened when he learns that her cellmate has been in there for 23 years for stealing a candy bar. At her trial, the Saudi court sentences Francine to death by stoning. Stan tells her that he will die with her by pretending to be a homosexual. At the stoning, the judge gets a call to let the family go. The Smith family gets back to America and Stan kisses the American soil.
“Stan of Arabia” has many negative representations centering on two issues: women’s rights and terrorism. Saudi women are oppressed and treated as second-class citizens in “Stan of Arabia.” Men appear to have their final word on everything and women obey. Francine wants to assimilate to the Saudi culture but later she admits that the culture is “insane.” She tries as hard as she can to leave the country, saying, “I’m dying.” It seems that Francine does not simply need time to adjust to this new environment, as everything looks different from her culture. Her feeling of disorientation is highly evident. Not only are women mistreated, but also they can be bought. Wearing a burka, a one-piece veil that covers the face, Roger is mistakenly sold to a man after he lustfully asks, “How much for the woman?”

Figure 2. Francine is arrested for her indecent dancing and singing. Courtesy of Fox. American Dad copyright © 2005 by Fox. All rights reserved.
In many of the family’s statements, women are presented as totally subjugated, as evidenced in the following quotes: (1) “Women can’t leave the home unless accompanied by a man,” (2) “The man has final say on everything,” (3) “Daddy makes decision Mommy makes a sandwich,” (4) “I got us a second wife…to help with cooking and cleaning,” and (5) “If you are a girl, it’s the worst place in the world.” Not only are women oppressed in Saudi Arabia, but they are also considered property. Stan forbids his wife to leave the house. When she ignores him and leaves, and no more than two seconds pass until two men with large knives bring her back, asking, “This belong to you?” Stan responds by thanking them, saying “just, uh- just put her anywhere.”

These images of Saudi women go beyond repression. In this portrayal, Saudi women do not even need an identity. Stan marries a Saudi woman as a second wife. Not only does she cover her face and hair in her husband’s presence, but also she utters, “I will serve husband in this life and the next.” The new wife is presented as a maid, as she cooks and literally bows when she hands Stan a sandwich. Because Stan finds his new wife’s name difficult to pronounce, he calls her Thundercat. As a Saudi woman, she does not need an identity. As Said asserts, these images of irrational inferiority serve to contrast the supposed superiority and rationality of the West (301-302). A woman stays home waiting for her master to arrive so she can serve him by any means possible. And Saudi men, of course, tell non-Saudis about the inferior status of their women.

Another major stereotype of Saudi Arabia in “Stan of Arabia” is that of terrorism. The family is terrified from the beginning just by being in the country. When the family lands on Saudi Arabian soil, Stan drives home and tries to calm his relatives. The first scene shows how Saudi Arabia is nothing but a place filled with terrorists—they lurk in the shadow waiting for
their next victim. Even when Stan declares his willingness to understand the culture, he is interrupted by the sound of an explosion:

All right, everyone stay calm. We may be in Saudi Arabia, but that doesn’t mean we have to panic or blame your mother. Just stay close, so we don’t leave ourselves open to an ambush.

Dad, that is so ignorant.

Hey, these people are extremists. That’s not ignorance. That’s fact. Quick! Cover your mouths! That’s how they enter your body to lay their eggs. Bullock can’t hold a grudge forever. I’ll call him every hour until he gives me my old job back.

I think this is an opportunity to really breathe in a culture that’s so different from-

[Explosion]

“Stan of Arabia” consistently shows Saudi Arabia in the context of terrorism, but this scene in particular reduces the nation to a place of mere terror. This perception is highlighted later when Stan installs extra locks on the doors and the windows and tells his family he did so “so you won’t get beheaded while I’m out!” Even Saudi children are portrayed as violent. When he meets his neighbor, Steve is shocked to hear him ask if he wants to “play guns.” The neighbor said this after showing real guns he owns.

Everyday life in Saudi Arabia is portrayed as dull and despicable. The Smiths ridicule almost everything in Saudi Arabia as shown by the following quotes: (1) “Not like here, with the sand and the heat,” (2) “Your country’s foreign policy is despicable,” (3) “Your culture is crude, and your gluttony and greed make me sick,” (4) “Oh, God! I’m gonna die out here!” and (5) “The culture seemed a bit insane.” Even the food can be unsafe. When the family wants to eat, Stan instantly shouts, “Are you insane? We’re not stopping for their food! Next, you’ll want to
use their bathrooms. I’ll be damned if I’m going to use their sandpapery toilet scrolls.” Even though the above statements can negatively portray the Smiths as being culturally intolerant, or inflexible, the negative treatment of the Saudi culture is more heightened, as the Smiths are absolutely unable to tolerate the supposed insanity of the culture. By refusing to present a fair, balanced portrayal of the culture, “Stan of Arabia” has a negative impact on how viewers perceive Arab culture, even though the latter has adopted some of that of the West. Nydell states that social change in the Arab world “has come through the adoption of Western technology, consumer products, healthcare systems, financial structures, educational concepts, and political ideas” (1). However, “Stan of Arabia” sets the tone for stereotypes of Arab culture that may lead some people to believe that the negative images are all true and based on realities.

Another bias of “Stan of Arabia” is the portrayal of Saudi men as hypocrites, while they run after some women shouting “whore” and seduce others. In the episode, a young Saudi man seduces Hayley by telling her that he is a terrorist. In order to convince him not to blow up the American embassy, Haley sleeps with him. Later, she finds out that he has lied—he only has a food stand in the American embassy. The belief that suicide bombings committed by Muslims is a result of limited sex is accepted by some scholars. Miller and Kanazawa state that the “prospect of exclusive access to virgins…[in heaven] is quite appealing to anyone who faces the bleak reality on earth of being a complete reproductive loser.” Hayley shares this stereotype since he appears to believe that sex-deprivation is what motivates young men to commit a suicide bombing of the American embassy. Here, “Stan of Arabia” reinforces the idea that terrorists are angry and violent because they are sex-deprived.

Before 9/11, Saudi Arabia was seen as a big desert with small houses and some camels and was known for oil, if nothing else. There was not much interest in exploring the culture of
the country. Only a few articles explored some aspects of the Saudi’s life. For example, in “Saudi Arabian Women Dispel Myths and Stereotypes,” Delinda Hanley recounts her first trip to the country since she left it in 1985. Hanley was amazed by the many changes that had occurred in the nation. She interviewed several ambitious and highly educated Saudi women who had achieved a lot in various fields. The article presents a positive view of Saudi Arabia, especially of Saudi women. It discusses how Saudi women play an important role in their country. Single women fill every moment of their lives with work, social activities with friends, and travel with their extended families. Women are less affected by the financial devastation of divorce than women in the West are.95

In the aftermath of 9/11, Saudi Arabia has become a center of attention in the media. Chas. W. Freeman, a former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia, states that there is an “enormous body of knowledge out there obviously on the part of people, who’ve never been to Saudi Arabia, don’t speak Arabic, never met a Saudi, but they know a lot because the conventional wisdom about Saudi Arabia is now ubiquitous. Everybody knows all sorts of things about Saudi Arabia” (SUSRIS).96 The media have tried to seek a better understanding and have asked many questions about Saudi Arabia for an obvious reason: 15 of the 19 hijackers of 9/11 were Saudis. Even though the U.S. has declared more than once that there is no evidence that supports that the Saudi government knowingly and willingly had a role in the attacks, and that the enemy was not a country or a race but rather a group of extremists capable of inflicting horrific damage on not only the U.S. but everywhere around the world, the media have largely blamed Saudi Arabia for the tragedy.97 In an interview, George W. Bush said there are “a lot of really good people here [in Saudi Arabia]. Look, you can’t deny the fact that some, a majority, of the terrorists came from Saudi, but you should not condemn an entire society based upon the actions of a handful of
killers.”98 Saudi government has also been confronting waves of violence to which mainstream Arabs do not approve.99 The distinguished professor of Islamic and regional studies Sherifa Zuhur asserts that Saudi Arabia has been facing a violent opposition movement for a long time (360).

Still, the most disturbing representation occurs when Francine breaks into a song about how horrible the lives of women are in Saudi Arabia. The song maintains that Saudi Arabia is “the worst place in the world.” In one segment, Francine sings:

You can’t go out unless you are escorted by a man
And when you do you come home with a butt crack full of sand
No alcohol, no rum and Cokes and no Dom Pérignon
At least a girl can have a smoke!
But not on Ramadan! – Oh, it’s a land of joy
If you are a boy
But if you are a girl
It’s the worst place in the world

Saudi Arabia has a conservative culture, but not one so strict that women cannot leave the house without a male escort. The standing of women in Saudi Arabia is generally misunderstood. The song is thoroughly condescending towards Saudi women, turning all of them into one homogenous group and reducing their purpose in life to serving men. The Saudi sociologist Mona Al-Munajjed states, “there is a huge misconception and misunderstanding in the rest of the world about the status of women in Saudi Arabia.”100 While pursuing her higher studies in the United States, Al-Munajjed has observed how Saudi women are negatively seen and how the perception of Saudi women as “taking on increasingly prominent public roles as educators,
businesswomen, bankers, doctors, scientists, philanthropists, writers, artists and decision makers in the government” is absent from their standing. The above segment suggests the belief that women are heavily reliant on men for their basic day-to-day needs. The subjugation of Saudi women projected through Francine’s words leaves viewers with the idea that being female in Saudi culture is an absolutely exhausting burden to bear as women’s movements are under male power.

This inferior status of Arab women is essential to the Western discourse in which it is used to justify any mission of making Arab women cast off their culture and modernize themselves through embracing Western values, as Leila Ahmed argues. In a similar vein, Gayatri Spivak notes that the understanding of Arab women’s inferiority is central in accepting the need to fight repressive and harmful practices in all cultures. Arab women have to appear highly oppressed in “Stan of Arabia” so viewers understand the need to save them from the horrible conditions in which they live. Francine feels suffocated in the culture. Her complaint about her rights as a woman is highlighted not only in the song but also throughout the rest of the two-part episode, which continues to represent women in Saudi Arabia as totally oppressed. For instance, in one scene, Francine meets her three neighbors, and all three women are wives to the same man. When the husband gets home, the three wives rush to him—two wives carry him into the house on their shoulders—and the first one asks him about his day while the second and the third ones ask, respectively, if he wants a snack and a bath. This scene serves to exaggerate the subservient nature of Saudi women. Furthermore, Stan complains about his wife to some Saudis who interrupt him after hearing him say that his wife said “no” to him. They immediately ask “what do you mean you asked your wife and she said no? You mean you told her and she obeyed.”
The Harm Caused by the Stereotypes in “Stan of Arabia”

Causal Attribution of Negative Traits

As noted earlier, discussing the nature of stereotypes involves looking at elements other than displaying negative images. Another major issue is the implicit attribution of negative traits to internal characteristics. An example is the idea that Saudi women are weak because they are Saudis and that their religion or culture is the cause of these negative traits (internal attribution) rather than their different life circumstances. This attribution serves to emphasize the advantage of Francine who refuses to be submissive because she is American (the other). Thus, viewers of “Stan of Arabia” may explain that the behaviors of Saudi women are due to their traits and abilities rather than the forces beyond their control (the conservative culture). On the status of women in Saudi Arabia, Mona Al-Munajjed has written several books showing how women have participated in the country’s development beyond the confines of a traditional society. Her recent book Saudi Women Speak: 24 Remarkable Women Tell Their Success Stories offers a positive representation of prominent Saudi women, providing a portrait of women that defies media constructions. Moreover, in her article, “7 Successful Saudi Women that Beat the Stereotype,” Valentina Primo gives several examples of prominent Saudi women who have gained world recognition in various fields. Writers of “Stan of Arabia” could have offered viewers a balanced portrayal by presenting prominent or even decent female characters, but they chose to ignore any positive images and display only stereotypes of Arabs.

Furthermore, not only does “Stan of Arabia” attempt to hold an entity of Saudis (the belief that their characteristics are fixed), but also it fails to present an incremental belief that the Saudis’ characteristics are malleable and can change over time. For example, though women’s rights suffer worldwide, women around the world are leading the way for reform by calling for
their full rights. In Saudi Arabia, women are actively claiming their rights and improving their status. Now, there are many female advisors on the Consultative Council that counsel the monarchy. Many Saudi women artists, educators, photographers, filmmakers, journalists, writers, and fashion designers have achieved positive critical acclaim regionally and internationally. Saudi women make up 70% of those enrolled in universities. Furthermore, studies show that the majority of family-owned businesses in Saudi Arabia are owned by women who are making a growing impact on the economy. Currently, these industries are worth more than SR4.5 billion ($1.2 billion). Moreover, Saudi Arabia is often criticized for its ban on women’s driving. Even though women drive off-road and in private housing compounds, they are prohibited from driving on public roads.

*Ingroup Favoritism and Outgroup Derogation*

Douglas Little notes that the belief in the racial inferiority of Arabs and the superiority of Americans has been fundamental in American popular culture (17). The problem with “Stan of Arabia” is what has always been—the cultural “other.” Through “Stan of Arabia’s” distorted lenses, Saudis and Arabs appear culturally different in ways the West is not able to bear. Even though Stan and his family are ridiculed, the negative portrayal of Saudis is more destructive than that of Stan and his family because, as the main focus of “American Dad,” they are given dozens upon dozens of episodes and storylines through which they triumph over their own damaging actions and negative portrayals by redeeming themselves at the end of each episode. This creates an imbalance between the levels of damage done by the caricatures of the family and the stereotypes of the Saudis: while Stan’s family experiences numerous cycles within episodes that end with redemption, the singularly featured Saudis are given no chance to overcome their transgressions, leaving viewers with a final and overwhelmingly negative
impression of Saudi Arabia. Moreover, American viewers know a lot of other Americans that can recognize caricatures as such, but they lack such understanding of Saudi Arabia.

Within “Stan of Arabia,” the positive traits of Stan and his family serve to emphasize the negative traits of the Saudi people through the strong contradictions between the two. For example, while Francine stands for her rights, the Saudi women appear submissive and weak. While Steve appears innocent, the Saudi children emerge as dangerous and violent. Even Stan, who appears self-centered, ethnocentric, and gender-biased, appears sincere and loving by the end of the episode, as evidenced by his dedication to save his wife. The last few minutes in “Stan of Arabia” send a strong message to its viewers regarding America’s superiority to Saudi Arabia. At the stoning, Stan dreams about President Bush coming to save them, bringing democracy, Bibles, and jeans to Saudi Arabia. Then, once Stan is saved and reaches America, he kisses its soil. In the context of “Stan of Arabia”, Saudi Arabia, with the awful culture (outgroup derogation), is seen as a divergent to America, the country of freedom—a divergence that would make Americans realize how great their country is (ingroup favoritism).

The Dictator

In 2012, Hollywood released The Dictator, a film in which Arabs are brandished with distorted stereotypical images. Sacha Baron Cohen stars in The Dictator in which he plays the role of a ruthless, racist, misogynistic Arab dictator named Aladeen (a variation of Aladdin). Aladeen rules a fictional North African country, Wadiya that he has oppressed for many years. After the West condemns his attempts to build a nuclear bomb, Aladeen goes to the United Nations to protest U.N. sanctions against him, but he is kidnapped and stripped of his beard. Aladeen’s chief advisor Tamir arranges to have him murdered while he was en route to a U.N. speech. Tamir replaces Aladeen with a double, also played by Cohen, who is to make Wadiya a
democratic state and open up his country to U.S. oil companies. Wandering through New York unrecognized, the real Aladeen encounters a liberal feminist, co-op manager Zoey, who mistakes him for a political prisoner. Zoey, who employs refugees from dictatorships, takes Aladeen under her wing. As a result, he falls for her even as he plots a secret return to power. However, the real dictator does not want democracy in his country; so he plans to show everyone his true identity, preventing Wadiya from becoming anything but a dictatorship.

One might ask why some people find a slapstick movie like *The Dictator* offensive. The movie is a work of comedy, and the gags are meant to entertain its viewers. This perception is true if the movie works as a parody of dictatorships in general or a merciless political satire. But why would we have a particular group, under the paradigm of satire, malevolently supply us with nothing but negative images. The discussion of *The Dictator* is significant in the representations of Arabs not because the film contains clichéd images of Arabs that have appeared in pre-9/11 films, but because this time it is an Arab leader who is put on the plate. The actor buries himself in the role of an eccentric, uncivilized Arab leader who has unlimited oil wealth. *The Dictator* builds on scenes instigated by the classical stereotypes of Arabs. The film’s poster (see Figure.3) shows Sacha Baron Cohen riding a camel, which is a clichéd image of Arabs that has appeared in a myriad of films. Even though camel riding is rare in the Arab world and is largely done as a tourist attraction or for other specific purposes, *The Dictator* perpetuates this consistent pattern of classic stereotypes of Arabs.

There is no substantial difference between Aladeen and ordinary Arabs portrayed in other movies. However, because he is a ruler, the images are exaggerated in *The Dictator*. The film begins with a mixture of real news footage and fictionalized material showing Aladeen’s dictatorship in Wadiya, where he rules the entire nation with an iron fist. His brutality is evident
as he gives a quick hand signal to order the execution of any person who irritates him. He eagerly administers the development of nuclear weaponry only to target Israel. The negative images begin to intensify after Aladeen falls into the care of Zoey, who is presented as the civilized American taking responsibility for teaching the backward, anti-Western Aladeen simple things about humanity. The portrayal of a backward Arab in Western discourse is fundamental. Said points out, “the Orient …[appears] lamentably under-humanized, antidemocratic, backward, barbaric, and so forth” (152). Working at Zoey’s store, Aladeen is portrayed in such a very discourteous manner. Because of her short hair, Aladeen thinks Zoey is a boy. Zoey gives him a job, and he is terrible at it. He slaps customers, kicks a disrespectful kid, throws the trash into the streets, takes a food inspector hostage to ensure the co-op receives top marks, and delivers a
baby; and when he discovers that it is a girl, he suggests they “throw it away.” The actions of Aladeen serve to represent the Orientals as primitive and violent.

Predictably, the stereotype of Arabs as terrorists is also present in this cluster of negative images. As a part of his plot to kill his double and regain power, Aladeen and Nadal (his former nuclear expert whom he had ordered to be exterminated) go on a helicopter flight to get a good view of the hotel where his double is staying. On this flight, there is a nice old American couple that is depicted in a very innocent way. In this scene, Aladeen and Nadal pretend to be ordinary American tourists, but their act goes wrong. Aladeen explains to Nadal in their “Arabic” that Osama Bin Laden is still living in his guesthouse. When Aladeen first mentions the name “Osama,” the other American couple gets alert. The couple is scared once they hear Aladeen talk about the accident he had with his old sport car, the Porsche 911. Pronouncing his Porsche 911 as “nine eleven” and mentioning some New York landmarks, Aladeen and Nadal manage to exploit the 9/11 fears. He says, “…I was driving my 911 near the palace one day...and I totally crashed! It’s ok, I’ve already ordered a new one. A brand new 911-2012.” Nadal then tells Aladeen, “you know, while you are here, you should try to see some of the sights such as the Empire State Building and Yankee Stadium.”

The way Aladeen and Nadal talk, which is not in real Arabic but rather in a gibberish language, makes the couple even more terrified of them. Arabic is portrayed as a peculiar language. Aside from the names of the characters, places, countries, and signs, the Arabic spoken by Aladeen is complete nonsense. Zuhur notes that Arabic is very difficult for a Western person (252). However, in The Dictator, when speaking Arabic, Aladeen says exaggeratedly “like-Arabic” gibberish to emphasize the oddness of the language. For example, in one scene he refers to the “season finale of Real Housewives of Shachahmahahfalimitahlicch” when he wants to watch his favorite TV show. Another example the film uses to show the strangeness of the
Arabic language is when Aladeen says “it is my way or the highwahahtmaafferrohshe-lechnichway.” Said points out that “Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, ‘us’) and the strange (the Orient, the East, ‘them’)” (43). The depiction of the Arabic language in such a peculiar way reinforces the idea that Arabs are anomalous in contrast to the normal West.

Moreover, The Dictator employs hatred toward Israel throughout the movie. The first few scenes clearly reveal this anti-Israel hate. Aladeen goes to see the missile his scientists have been developing and ignorantly asks the scientists to “explain…how this bomb will not land in Israel and then, literally, bounce right back and blow up Wadiya.” Not only does Aladeen want to bomb Israel, but he also enjoys playing Wii games based on the Munich Olympics massacre where 11 members of the Israeli Olympic team were killed.112 Furthermore, the final scene shows Aladeen marrying Zoey who stomps on a glass and says the Jewish phrase “mazel tov” (“congratulations”). Knowing for the first time that his spouse is Jewish, Aladeen makes the hand signal ordering her execution. Even though Zoey took him under her wing and even though she is his wife now, Aladeen harbors hatred toward her because she is Jewish. The message presented here is that Arabs hold a deep hostility towards Jews and nothing can change that, not even marriage.

Sacha Baron Cohen claims in many interviews that Aladeen is “not an Arab” and that he refused to use the Arabic language.113 It is true that there are no Arabic scripts in the movie, but the Arabic-sounding language used in it is quite enough to draw the picture when coupled with the fictional flag of Wadiya (Figure 4). The flag has a fictional language that is closely associated with Arabic writing. Furthermore, the name Aladeen is a name that is widely used in the Arab world even if it is spelled differently from Aladdin, the famous Arab adventurer from One Thousand and One Nights—also known as The Arabian Nights. The continuous mentioning
of Arab places or countries is a major indication that the movie is about Arab culture. In the scene where Aladeen is about to be tortured, the torturer shows him the “Kandahar Cock Wrench” that makes Aladeen respond “it’s actually been banned in Saudi Arabia for being too safe.” In the same scene, after being shown another torture device, Aladeen exclaims “oh, the Fallujah Firehose!”

Another disturbing aspect of *The Dictator* is the negative representation of women in the movie. *The Dictator* does not speak of Arab women; however, it deliberately presents Arabs’ perception of women. In the film, women are sex objects. Because the main character is a wealthy Arab, the images are intensified. Aladeen brings movie stars to his chamber and puts a picture of each one he sleeps with on the wall. Within the motion picture, not only are women used for pleasure, they are also seen as an inferior species. When Aladeen sees how well educated Zoey is, he says, “I love it when women go to school. It’s like seeing a monkey on rollerskates. It means nothing to them, but it’s so adorable for us.” Said states that in the Orient’s mind, according to Western modes of thinking, “women are usually the creatures of a male
power-fantasy…[and] they are more or less stupid” (207). A similar perception of women is reflected in Aladeen’s misogynist remarks.

On November 17, 2004, Jack Cafferty, host of CNN’s American Morning show, said the “Arab World is where innocent people are kidnapped, blindfolded, tied up, tortured and beheaded, and then a videotape of all of this is released to the world as though they’re somehow proud of their barbarism. Somehow, I wouldn’t be too concerned about the sensitivity of the Arab world. They don’t seem to have very much…It’s going to come down to them or us.” When talking about Arabs, Cafferty describes a world of terror that would come to the United States. This perception is highlighted in The Dictator. The stereotyping of Arabs as people who embody ceaseless evil is apparent in The Dictator’s indication that the wounds of 9/11 are still raw and that other terrorist attacks are highly possible. After Aladeen arrives in New York, an American bodyguard tells him, “while you’re here, I highly recommend a visit to the Empire State Building, before you or one of your sand-monkey cousins takes it down.” The use of a racial slur here (sand-monkey) is part of a long history of epithets against Arabs that have been circulating in Hollywood for a long time. Shaheen offers examples of these uncontested slurs that have appeared in the past decades: “camel-dicks”, “devil-worshippers”, “towel-heads”, “sons-of-unnamed-goats”, and “rag-heads” (Shaheen, Reel Bad Arabs 26).

The Harm Caused by the Stereotypes in The Dictator

The Dictator is another major example of how the media manufactures the cascade of stereotypes that negatively portray Arabs and create hatred and fear of them. Similar to “Stan of Arabia,” the problem with the stereotypes in the movie is not only the portrayal of Arabs in a negative manner because the images (for example, tyrannical regimes in the Arab world and hostility to Israel) are based on some realities. However, The Dictator shows tyranny in the
context of Arabs (distinctiveness) and conveys the West’s benevolence in terms of helping other
countries overcome their political oppression and allowing them to grow in prosperity and
stability (superiority). The representations in *The Dictator*, thus, do not just derogatorily portray
Arabs. They also suggest a superior-inferior dichotomy. The dominant ingroup is shown as
morally superior, more sophisticated, and in many ways better than the outgroup members as
Richard Dyer observes, “The establishment of normalcy through stereotypes is one aspect of the
habit of ruling groups … to attempt to fashion the whole of society according to their own world-
view, value-system, sensibility and ideology.”\(^{115}\)

Some critics of *The Dictator* charge it with offering negative stereotypes and excluding
Arab actors. The comedian Dean Obeidallah sees *The Dictator* as a “‘minstrel show’ of Arabs in
‘buffoonish brownface’” and argues that “Baron Cohen excludes Arabs from the major roles in
his film and thereby misses his chance not only to give the movie an ‘inside’ and more
‘authentic’ feel, but ends up potentially racist by virtue of exclusion.”\(^{116}\) Moviegoers who watch
*The Dictator* and who would laugh at the satire in the movie will be presented with an image of a
buffoon-like Arab who hates the West and Jews and who will remain uncivilized. The final scene
of the movie shows that Arabs cannot be civilized, as if brutality and backwardness are
genetically encoded in them (internal causation). After declaring at the U.N. that he will create a
new constitution and hold free elections, Aladeen wins the elections deceitfully, and nothing has
changed. It is still a dictatorship.

**Conclusion**

While the birth of Hollywood over a century ago is intertwined with the stereotypes of
Arabs, in modern culture, the stereotypes’ impact is more significant as moviegoers and TV
viewers have skyrocketed in numbers.\(^{117}\) *The Dictator* has grossed over $50,000,000 at the
domestic box office during its theatrical runs and $119,729,311 on the overseas market. As for “Stan of Arabia,” the first episode was watched by 7.30 million people in the United States in 2005 and the second one was viewed by 7.74 million, not to count the millions who have watched it since. Through the Orientalism’s lens, we see in these two features a portrayal of Arabs as people who live in a world of decadence, irrationality, and backwardness. When a group of people are presented as the enemy or “Other,” the probability that they will be subject to malicious harassment or profiling is very high. For those who know little about Arabs, what are the chances that they are going to do research on the culture and beliefs of Arabs after watching The Dictator or “Stan of Arabia”? The exposure to such features is problematic because it influences viewers’ perception. Research shows that the media plays a significant role in people’s perception (Hubbard, Defleur, and Defleur1975; & Huston 1992). When a feature draws such large numbers of viewers and offers them distorted perceptions of Arabs and casting Arabs as the “Other,” a solution to this problem of negative stereotyping becomes more of a necessity than ever before. Needless to say, the more the media shows stereotypes of Arabs, the stronger they become. In a public opinion poll conducted by a private research institution, it has been shown that American’s perception of Arabs is more negative than positive.

The analyses of “Stan of Arabia” and The Dictator have so far exposed many stereotypes of Saudis/Arabs. Suppose a young American (e.g., John), has little knowledge about the Arab world and sees one of these two features. John now would develop a schema for Arabs, e.g., that their women are oppressed and their men are villains who do dastardly things. John would perceive Arabs in a negative manner. As discussed earlier with respect to schemas, when John encounters an Arab for the first time, his attention—which is now driven by the representations that appeared in the feature he saw—leads him to label and put them into one or several
categories. Moreover, this chapter has shown that an understanding of the danger of stereotypes requires looking at not only how Arabs are negatively perceived, but also how the causes of their negative stereotypes are implicitly misattributed to them through forces beyond their control, and how those negative traits lead to create ingroup-outgroup distinctions. In order to mitigate the damage of stereotypes, it is crucial to address the above elements.

The damage of stereotypes in the two features and others can be reduced through literature. Reading carefully crafted Arabic narratives can change the perception of Arabs. Johnson and his colleagues have shown that reading a positive narrative about Muslims/Arabs has had effects on readers’ perceptions of Arabs.\textsuperscript{121} However, some fictional narratives may promote stereotypes which can do damage like that of media. Research has revealed that literature can foster abusive stereotypes of groups. For example, in his exhaustive study of the Jew's image in American literature, Louis Harap notes that there has been a persistence of negative stereotypes of Jews (e.g., evil, money-obsessed, haters of Christians,) in many works of American literatures.\textsuperscript{122} Similarly, John Hollenbach records that nineteenth-century English and American literature has faint understanding of Arabs and most of the images were negative (e.g., savage hordes, slippery, treacherous, etc.)\textsuperscript{123} Therefore, it is important to choose carefully crafted narratives that do not do damage in order to effectively promote a sound understanding of Arabs. This dissertation attempts to integrate literature and cognitive science and examines how Arabic literature using the power of empathy can develop schemas about Arabs that eventually replace the existing faulty ones.
CHAPTER FOUR
REDUCING THE DAMAGE OF STEREOTYPES THROUGH MEN IN THE SUN

Insofar as they play a significant role in offering information and entertainment to vast audiences, the media has influenced people’s attitudes through the provision of stereotypes. The knowledge people receive about the world—including stereotypes—are stored and organized in one’s memory (creating cognitive schemas) and retrieved later when needed. Schemas are important and useful in people’s interactions with others. However, schemas become problematic when they contain harmful information about a particular group (for example, Arabs). Stereotypes are equally damaging because they simplify people’s thinking about the social world and lead them to have negative views about a group. The danger of stereotypes, however, lies not only in their ascription of negative images to a group, but also in people’s tendency to attribute dispositional factors when explaining negative behaviors of outgroup members (causality theory), their implicit assertion that these negative traits are unique to these groups (distinctiveness), and, finally, in their creation of a distinction between one’s own group and an outgroup (ingroup favoritism/outgroup derogation.) The understanding of these harmful elements is crucial to determine how literature can become a useful tool to ameliorate the animosity towards Arabs. The improvement of people’s perceptions toward Arabs entails the correction of the harmful elements of stereotypes. Using Ghassan Kanafani’s Men in the Sun as an example, this chapter examines thoroughly how literature can be used to mitigate the harm caused by stereotypes of Arabs. The key ingredient is literature’s power to generate empathy, which can be elicited to direct readers’ cognitive processes to achieve desired goals.
Empathy is “the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.” Such ability yields positive effects. Research shows that empathy leads to having supportive relationships (Hanson, Jones, & Carpenter 1984), altruistic motivation (Batson et al. 2010), and relationship competence (Wiemann & Backlund 1980). One of the most important and helpful consequences of empathy is its ability to change people’s attitudes. As noted in chapter one, there is empirical support for empathy’s profound impact on how people perceive others. Literature can be a vehicle through which empathy can arise and have such positive influence. In her book *Empathy and The Novel*, Suzanne Keen explores the relationship between reading literature and empathy induction. Keen elucidates the importance of empathy in reading when she writes that “empathy, a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect, can be provoked by witnessing another’s emotional state, by hearing about another’s condition, or even by reading” (4). A stimulus elicits empathy in people whether they learn about a person’s experiences or read a text.

Literature is an excellent tool that aids us in learning how to reduce bias against outgroup members. But in order for literature to be an effective tool, Mar and Oately add, “we must acknowledge the common humanity present between ourselves and dissimilar ones. Without the readers assuming the same (or similar) emotions, desires, and beliefs to those of the protagonist in the story, the phenomenon of transportation, enjoyment, and ultimately understanding would remain elusive” (181). Once readers understand the protagonists’ feelings, literature becomes a tool that encourages empathy and helps reduce bias toward the people in question. It is an opportunity for readers to identify and understand a world that has been perceived through tinted glasses. Writers of fictional narratives build an alternative world in which characters are not obscure to readers’ worlds.
In addition, Mar and Oately state that in literature, authors attempt to design characters that acquire familiar psychology (185). The perception of this world gives rise to our emotions that are sometimes unrecognizable outside of literature. Oatley remarks that we “do not always recognize our emotions or the emotions of others, but literary fiction can help improve our skills of recognition and understanding” (206). One way in which literature has the power to foster this emotion recognition is through the teaching of carefully crafted Arabic fiction that exhibits less bias toward Arabs. Using *Men in the Sun*, one can enable readers to imagine the characters’ problems, worries, and more importantly, their states of emotion. Thus, literature can open up as well as inspire readers to understand people’s beliefs, empathize with individuals with whom we have no personal experience, and eventually reduce bias against outgroup members.

**A Brief General Overview of the Story**

Kanafani tells the story beautifully in seven short chapters that revolve around the harsh conditions of life the protagonists endure. Each of the first three chapters introduces a protagonist—Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan, consecutively—each of whom comes from a different generation. In these chapters, readers learn why the three characters left Palestine and sought work in Kuwait. The remaining chapters chronicle the journeys of these three Palestinians whose stories end tragically. In their attempt to smuggle themselves into Kuwait, inside a truck’s water tank driven by Abul Khaizuran, who is delayed at the frontier by security, Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan suffocate to death. Interpreting their death, Geoffrey Bowder argues that the characters’ “individual experiences up to the point of setting out on their last fateful journey mirror the pain, humiliation and degradation felt by thousands of Palestinians [or refugees] in their daily lives” (120). The harsh conditions under which Palestinian languish are manifested in the traumas of the three protagonists whose pursuit of material success that comes
as a result of their suffering fails. Kanafani attempts to present how one’s struggle for a prosperous life undergoes agony and indignity.

Throughout the novella, the author uses flashbacks through which readers learn about the characters’ lives. Abu Qais is an old man, who had been a farmer before the dispossession. Now he tries to find any means of income in order to support his growing family. Abu Qais is the father of a young boy named Qais. His baby girl, Hosna died because she was extremely emaciated. Assad, a young man, does not have any surviving parent to care for him. He borrows money from his uncle who hopes Assad will return to marry his daughter. Assad attempts for the second time to reach Kuwait. Assad had a traumatic experience the first time. In that trip, the driver tricks Assad by making him get out of the truck and walk around one of the pumping stations to reach Kuwait, but Assad is actually dropped off far away from his destination. Assad has a near death experience due to the extreme heat. Marwan is the youngest of the three men. His father left the family to marry another woman, leaving Marwan to be responsible for the family. Because his older brother, Zakaria, who works in Kuwait, is no longer sending money to support the family, Marwan drops out of school and decides to go to Kuwait to send money to help make his mother's life easier.

The three meets with Abu Khuzairan, who agrees to smuggle them for ten rather than the fifteen dinars, which had been demanded from them. Abu Khuzairan owns a water truck, which he uses to help smuggle people to Kuwait. The four agree to the hard condition that Abu Khuzairan sets before them. They must hide in a water tank at the checkpoints during the noon heat. In the last checkpoint, officials delays Abu Khuzairan in arranging the paperwork by laughing about his supposed relationship with a dancer. When he gets the paper stamped and drives away from the checkpoint, he hurriedly opens the tank to let the men out, but finds the
three men have dead. He eventually leaves the bodies on the side of a road; hoping people will find them and give them a funeral.

**Invoking Readers’ Empathy**

Literature can educate us, broadly socialize us, and boost our capacity for empathy, and, hence, our tendency to do good. It provides the variety of feelings that individuals experience when reading fictional narratives. Research shows that four kinds of feelings occur while reading literature: (1) evaluative feelings toward the text such as enjoyment or pleasure, which play no important role in the text’s interpretation; (2) narrative feelings such as empathy with the author or a character that are involved in the interpretive processes; (3) aesthetic feelings such as fascination or interest to components of literary texts—for example, narrative or stylistic; and (4) self-modifying feelings—the experience in which feelings in one situation leads to the re-experiencing of those feelings in situations that are similar. This project focuses on empathy, the second kind, because it is central to an attitude change towards others. The difference between self-modifying feelings and narrative feelings (empathy) is that the former restructures the readers’ understanding of themselves rather than others.

The elicitation of readers’ empathy is a key ingredient in changing attitudes because it can be used as a motivational force to direct the readers’ cognitive processes to desired goals. To experience empathy, readers need to (1) recognize other’s significant suffering, (2) realize that their suffering is beyond their control—the role of war, for example—and (3) recognize their common humanity, which Mark Bracher cites in “How to Teach for Social Justice” as three basic appraisals required for empathy to occur (366-7). The failure to empathize or the presence of indifference come as a result of, as Bracher goes on to explain, having one or more incorrect appraisals (367). The basic premise of empathy relies on its motivational ability from which
The elicitation of empathy can be used to influence the readers’ perception positively. Hence, literature serves as a vehicle for empathic growth, which leads to the reduction of stereotypes and prejudice. What follows is a discussion on how readers’ perception of Arabs can be improved through the use of two empathy arousal modes—role taking and direct association.

**Empathy Arousal: Through Direct Association**

When people experience empathy, they feel as if they were having someone else’s feelings as their own. They observe, see, think, and understand as if they were the other person. However, the emotion of the observer does not have to be exactly the same as that of the character he or she is reading about. One way readers can empathize with others is through direct association. When reading *Men in the Sun*, readers can observe cues from the text that inspire similar experiences, leading them to evoke their emotions. Direct association only requires that the readers have had feelings of pain or discomfort in the past so that these feelings can be elicited by cues in the text that are similar to the past feelings. Omdahl notes: “[T]he observer must have had past experiences with different emotional states” (25). When the readers’ empathetic responses are evoked, their cognitive processes can be directed to create more adequate schemas and replace the faulty ones. What makes direct association a useful mechanism in literature is that it has more scope than other empathy-arousing modes. Hoffman states that direct association “provides the basis for a variety of distress experiences in others…” with which people empathize (47). Readers’ past feelings of distress, thus, can be evoked by similar experiences found in *Men in the Sun*. These readers identify a relation to some extent between their experiences and the characters’ experiences, which leads to the triggering of empathetic responses. Therefore, as Oately argues, “emotions provide us with scripts not of
words, but of relating—in happy co-operation, in sad disengagement, in angry conflict, in shared fear, and so on—and we supply fitting words in our interactions with each other” (209).

The story of Abu Qais can provide an explanation of how direct association functions. In Men in the Sun, Abu Qais travels thousands of miles to meet the smuggler to discuss the trip’s arrangement. He tries to lower the price, but the smuggler refuses and states that the price is fixed. As helpless as he is, Abu Qais agrees. Because Saad has returned from Kuwait with a lot of money, Abu Qais pictures himself coming with bags of money to support his family. There is nothing in Abu Qais’s mind but his homeland. The author illustrates the passion Abu Qais feels for his beloved country when he writes:

He [Abu Qais] felt that his whole head had filled with tears, welling up from inside, so he turned and went out into streets. There human beings began to swim behind a mist of tears, the horizon of the river and the sky came together, and everything around him became simply an endless white glow. He went back, and threw himself down with his chest on the damp earth, which began to beat beneath him again, while the scent of the earth rose to his nostrils and poured into his veins like a flood. (28)

The passage suggests strong feelings of agony that have escalated out of dispossession, poverty, and displacement, none of which are confined to Abu Qais. Abu Qais’s inability to see people clearly reflects the traumatic episodes of his life. In this excerpt it is also apparent that the author attempts to accentuate the importance of home, as is evident in the imagery presented. The image conveyed in the line “the scent of the earth rose to his nostrils and poured into his veins like a flood” shows the intense zeal and love for his homeland. This view is clearly displayed through the author’s equation of the power of scent with that of a flood, expressing the
robust state of passion Abu Qais is experiencing once he has realized the momentousness of his departure. As noted earlier, direct association does not entail pairing actual painful experiences. It is enough that readers have had painful experiences that are similar to the distress cues from Abu Qais or his situation, so that their empathetic responses are elicited. For example, if readers have experienced unemployment or poverty that have caused strains on relationships or brought feelings of depression, their emotional responses are more likely to be evoked when reading about Abu Qais’s experiences. Palestine is central to these experiences. Douglas Magrath points out that *Men in the Sun* is concerned with the “Palestinian people’s search for identity in a hostile world that has denied them their existence. The work expresses the disaster that has resulted from ineffective leadership, false hope, and cruel circumstances” (95). Even though the traumatic experiences of Abu Qais in *Men in the Sun* represent the ordeal and journey of thousands of Palestinians who constantly endure the hell-like desert just for the hope of a better life, readers’ own experiences can be triggered by the character’s affect.

Moreover, Abu Qais’s experience serves as an example of how literature can foster direct association. Research explains the mechanisms responsible for direct association. For instance, Paul Blaney argues that there is a particular region for each emotion in the brain (230). For example, in our minds there are nodes for excitement, happiness, sadness, and so forth. These units lead to having actions, bodily change, or facial configurations. To further explain this process, Omdahl writes:

The emotion nodes are connected by associative pointers to other events from one’s life during which the particular emotions were aroused above a threshold. That means that when person experiences sadness in the present, it activates memories of prior experiences with sadness. When activated, the emotion unit
excites those nodes producing the bodily sensations and expressive behaviors assigned to that emotion. (24)

Onadahl’s quotation suggests that people are hardwired with the ability to associate current emotional experiences with similar ones from past events. Thus, readers of Abu Qais’s experience of distress can activate their own experiences of distress, which eventually lead them to empathize with the character. *Men in the Sun* offers many cues through which readers can recall similar experiences and have empathy for Abu Qais. In the story, Abu Qais’s fear of being plunged further into poverty, as he has already lost his main source of income, his olive trees, can prompt readers to empathize with his plight. Specifically, readers can understand that his displacement comes from deprivation and suffering. They can also see how his decision to seek work in Kuwait occurs after his friend reprobate reprobates his effortless life and the fact that he has done nothing but wait for ten years. The following dialogue reflects Abu Qais’ dilemma:

-Do you like this life here? Ten years have passed and you live like a beggar. It’s disgraceful. Your son, Qais, when will he go back to school? Soon the other one will grow up. How will you be able to look at him when you haven’t…?

-All right. That’s enough.

-No. It’s not enough. It’s terrible. You are responsible for a big family now. Why don’t you go there? (26-27)

Here we see an old family man who lost a baby due to malnutrition, whose wife is pregnant, and whose family will starve to death unless he manages to get money. Readers are invited to recall experiences in which they have pursued a new life in other places in order to support their spouses or children. Such readers may remember times in which their economic status had put strain on a relationship or brought feelings of depression. The decision one makes to leave a
family is tough on both the person and his or her family. Reading about the similar emotions and circumstances that Abu Qais experiences due to his poverty and family ordeals can allow readers to develop empathetic responses towards the character. In this sense, readers can empathize with the theme of departure in the novel that Kanafani masterfully describes when he writes about the moment Abu Qais leaves his wife, “He broke off, and looked at her. He had known that she would start weeping; her lower lip would tremble a little and then one tear would well up, gradually growing bigger and slipping down her brown, wrinkled cheek” (27). The facial expression of Abu Qais’s wife is intense. Abu Qais’s wife knows that raising her children without her husband’s presence is going to be a struggle. She remains silent as her husband ponders leaving his family. She realizes that her life will be tougher than it was before. The depictions of these events from Abu Qais’s life and the emotional states of the protagonist and his wife help provide a motivational basis for readers to improve their attitudes towards Arabs.

**Empathy Arousal: Through Role Taking**

Role taking requires that readers picture themselves in a character’s place and imagine how the other feels. Because of the concept of adopting another role, Hoffman says that this empathic-arousing mood involves using “advanced level of cognitive processing” (52). In a similar vein, Deborah Blagg notes, “A keen interest in humans’ distinctive capacity [is their ability] to decipher the thoughts and feelings of others.” Moreover, the educational psychologist Hunter Gehlbach asserts, “Psychologists believe that our ability to read others supports one of our primary drives as human beings, the drive to relate to others and form social bonds.” Because we tend to be selective in choosing with whom we emphasize with, this strategy helps readers understand others who are different from them through imagining themselves in the position of a character. But, first, students need to develop a basic
understanding of the narrative and refrain from creating judgment until ample information about the story and context are available. For example, when discussing *Men in the Sun*, it is important to provide a historical background on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict so readers can have a better understanding of the periods during which the three protagonists have undergone tremendous ordeals. Kanafani’s narrative describes a period in the Palestinians’ lives when they smuggled themselves into other Arab states in search of material success. This period started in 1948, when thousands of Palestinians fled their homes, what is now Israel, and became refugees, a historic event known as the Palestinian Exodus of 1948.\(^{133}\) Zalman states that “*Men in the Sun* has gained its status as a classic of modern Palestinian literature for having lyrically dramatized the national mood of failure in and following the war of 1948” (20).\(^{134}\) Also, *Men in the Sun* was published originally in Arabic in 1962—only five years before the war of 1967.

Another important perspective from current research is Suzanne Keen’s statement that “readers’ empathy for situations depicted in fiction may be enhanced by chance relevance to particular historical, economic, cultural, or social circumstances” (81). Keen discusses the importance of exposing readers to historical, social, and cultural contexts in order to facilitate their empathetic response. In her study, “Development of Empathetic Responses with Multicultural Literature,” Belinda Louie substantially investigated high school students’ empathetic responses to a Chinese novella. The students’ responses were studied after they were exposed to the cultural, political, and historical context of Feng Jicai’s *Let One Hundred Flowers Bloom*. The story deals with an innocent artist’s agony and endurance during the Chinese Cultural Revolution (570). At first, the students criticized the Chinese Communist ideology and associated the new information they learned with what they had known in their lives. Then, the students were able to recognize the characters’ positions. The study concluded that providing a
context increases empathy in readers (576). Thus, the historical context offers us an exact account of the circumstances in which literary characters try to survive and achieve their goals.

In addition, research shows that role taking can improve people’s perceptions of stigmatized groups. Clore and Jeffrey found that taking the role of a disabled person (traveling in a wheelchair for a short period of time) improves attitudes towards the disabled. Moreover, Batson and his colleagues used role taking to make participants empathize with a member of a stigmatized outgroup (a woman with AIDS). Batson and other scholars found that such an approach leads to an increased understanding of the stigmatized person and causes the empathic participant to have a more positive attitude towards the group to which the target belongs. The improvement of attitudes comes as a result of the participants’ emotional experience of empathy. Given that role taking can be effective in reducing negative attitudes, it is more likely that being in a character’s shoes yields similar positive results.

*Men in the Sun* encompasses several characters with which readers can empathize. To illustrate how role taking can be used to improve people’s perception, one can discuss two examples from the novella: the trauma of Abul Khaizuran and the catastrophic end of the three protagonists. Abul Khaizuran is the smuggler who appears happy throughout the journey to Kuwait, which prompts one of the three protagonists of *Men in the Sun* to ask about his life and whether he is married. However, the question unleashes Abul Khaizuran’s despondent feelings about his traumatic past that he keeps hidden behind a mask of happiness. While fighting for his country in the past, Abul Khaizuran was captured by an enemy who physically emasculated him. The author writes about Abul Khaizuran’s painful experience:

Abul Khaizuran shook his head; then he narrowed his eyes to meet the sunlight that had suddenly struck the windscreen. The light was shining so brightly that at
first he could see nothing. But he felt a terrible pain coiled between his thighs.
After a few moments, he could make out that his legs were tied to two supports
that kept them suspended, and that there were several men surrounding him …
He could only remember one thing that had happened to him a moment before
and nothing else. He and a number of armed men were running along when all
hell exploded in front of him, and he fell forward on his face. (52-53)
The above lines serve as a good cue through which readers can empathize with Abul Khaizuran.
Galinsky and Moskowitz contend that when participating in role taking, people trigger the self-
concept—one’s belief about himself or herself—which would then be applied to the outgroup.138
Readers can picture themselves in the position of Abul Khaizuran who wakes up after his
manhood has been stripped away. The author writes about how Abul Khaizuran feels: “He had
lived that humiliation day after day and hour after hour. He had swallowed it with his pride and
examined it every moment of those ten years. And still he hadn’t yet got used to it, he hadn’t
accepted it. For ten long years, he had been trying to accept the situation?”(53). Because the
trauma haunts him, as his internal monologue reveals, Abul Khaizuran tries as best he can to help
the three men as well as others in order to compensate for his lost self-worth. Helping others
offers him another sort of manhood. However, the trauma is so intense that Abul Khaizuran
literally feels the pain. The author writes: “[T]he same feelings of pain plunging between his
thighs came back to him, as though he were still lying under the bright round light with his legs
suspended in the air” (54). When readers gather information about Abul Khaizuran and read
about what he feels, they can take a psychological perspective by positioning themselves in his
emotional state in an attempt to perceive what he sees. Such positioning can produce emotional
responses even if readers differ from the character in significant ways. Keen notes that empathy
occurs “even when the character and reader differ from each other in all sorts of practical and obvious ways” (69). For example, female readers of *Men in the Sun* can empathize with the traumatic experience of Abul Khaizuran even though they bear no physical similarity to this traumatic episode.

Although the concept of empathy has emotional and cognitive values, the elicitation of empathy in literature is simple. Keen states, “empathy for fictional characters may require only minimal elements of identity, situation, and feeling, not necessarily complex or realistic characterization” (69). As long there is a condition in which a character’s emotion is expressed—even if it is nonhuman like a toy or animal—readers’ empathy can be provoked. It is useful to use this empirically established belief that literature stimulates us to see the world from the perspective of a member of a stigmatized group and then have empathy for this member whom we eventually generalize, making us feel more positively toward the group as a whole. Moreover, the belief that there is not a single literary work that could evoke empathy in all its readers is essential. Perceptions of literary works differ as they do with movies, arts, or tourist attractions. However, failure to empathize does not mean literature does not induce empathetic responses. Rather it shows that some readers are not able to identify shared values between themselves and the characters in question. Haslam explains that when an outgroup “is perceived to have dissimilar values to the ingroup, it is perceived to lack shared humanity, and its interests can be disregarded” (255). However, with proper intervention, those readers’ emotions are more likely to be elicited.

The second empathy-arousal example can be drawn from the tragic end of the characters. Throughout the journey to Kuwait, the three characters undergo horrendous conditions. At the boarders, Abul Khaizuran is extremely irritated that the officials have delayed him by harassing
him about a dancer he was rumored to have been with. After he passes the borders, he stops the truck sharply and, in haste, climbs to its roof. Feeling that his hands will burn as soon as he touches the metal roof, he uses his elbows in their sleeves to climb. He looks at his watch again and it is twelve to nine. He opens the water tank and yells for Assad. He hears no response and decides to slide down inside the tank. These scenes foreshadow the suffering that transpires in the following depiction of Abul Khaizan’s situation that the author gives:

It was very dark there, and at first he couldn’t make out anything, but when he moved his body from the opening, a circle of yellow light fell into the depths and showed a chest covered with thick gray hair that began to shine brightly as though coated with tin. Abul Khaizuran bent to put his ear to the damp gray hair. The body was cold and still. Stretching out his hand, he felt his way to the back of the tank. The other body was still holding on to the metal support. He tried to find the head but could only feel the wet shoulders; then he made out the head, bowed on the chest. When his hand touched the face, it fell into a mouth open as wide as it could go. (71)

Here we have a painful picture of Abul Khaizuran’s predicament that readers can use to create a mental image of the tragedy. Through these lines, readers can realistically visualize the terrible conditions the protagonists have experienced. The scene described here is unbearably intense since Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan die tragically of suffocation and heat exhaustion. Yet this predicament is useful since it allows readers to picture themselves in the position of being in the tank until death. They can imagine themselves in the tank waiting for the driver to come back. It is very dark there and the heat is unbearable. They can envision being extremely exhausted and
thinking about their families back home. The description of how one feels in such painful conditions can lead to triggering emotions.

**Correcting Faulty Schemas**

*Exemplars Versus Prototypes*

In his important research on schemas, the famous psychologist Bartlett attempted to study how stories evolve from cultures that are different from those transmitting the stories. Bartlett’s research demonstrates that because people have prior knowledge (schemas) about the structures of stories, important details are often missing from the narratives. The construction of people’s schemas about social groups may lack some critical aspects that would lead to having faulty schemas. For example, the images of Palestinians have been mostly negative (e.g., evil, terrorists, etc.) and the acquisition of such information about Palestinians is misleading and dangerous. Shaheen states, “many Americans are ignorant about the history and plight of the Palestinian people” (“Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People” 186). What are absent from these images are depictions of Palestinians as teachers, engineers, doctors, farmers, and family people. This type of humanizing portrayal is present in Arabic literature, and *Men in the Sun* offers a great opportunity for readers to acquire positive knowledge that would comprise one’s understanding of Palestinians.

In *Men in the Sun*, readers are invited to acquire cognitive representations (exemplars) of Palestinians/Arabs that include admired features that are expected to be descriptive of Arabs. Sia and other scholars explain that “attitudes toward social categories depend at least in part on which category members come to mind as a symbolic representation of the category” (502). If the readers change the existing exemplars they have of the Palestinian category and replace them with those of the three male protagonists that are discussed above, their judgment can be
positively influenced. Thus, when the categorization of Palestinians takes place, readers are more likely to access the newly stored exemplars that include admirable attributes and use them in their interactions with Palestinians. The exemplar perspective is based on the premise that if it is rendering positive instances of people, it can cause attitudes to become more positive. In the exemplar model, individuals judge a certain category by associating new stimuli with similar instances that are already stored in memory. If a number of similarities exist between the new stimuli and the stored instances, observers assign the new stimulus to a category. A famous example in psychology that illustrates how the exemplar model functions is the “bird” category. Individuals construct the “bird” category by keeping in their memory a group of all the birds they have encountered. If a new stimulus (e.g., seeing a Toucan for the first time) has features that are similar to those of some of the already stored birds, people would categorize that stimulus in the “bird” category.

*Men in the Sun* can offer an opportunity for individuals to change their negative attitudes towards Arabs by exposing them to multiple admired exemplars. To illustrate the use of exemplars, one can use Marwan as a sample. He is represented as the youngest and the boldest of the three protagonists. He has a determination to leave Palestine, which has been encouraged by the presence of a family. Also, he wants to support his mother and siblings after his father deserted them. The situation in the family changed after his brother stopped sending money from Kuwait to support his family. Marwan’s father felt he could neither support his family nor himself. Marwan’s torn family and the need for money motivates him to seek work in Kuwait. Because he appears determined, sympathetic, courageous, and caring, Marwan can be selected as an exemplar model’s representation of Palestinians.
Another example that can represent the Palestinian/Arab category can be obtained from Marwan’s mother whose husband left his four children and her for another woman. Marwan’s mother appears wise, strong, and pragmatic even though Marwan does not like the fact that she has remained silent about his father’s leaving. In a letter he sends to his mother Marwan writes, “I don’t want to hate anybody; it is beyond me to do so even if I wanted to, But why did he do that, to you? You didn’t like any of us to talk about him, I know. But why do you think he did that?” (39; emphasis in the original). Although the family’s financial stability was shaken, leading Marwan to feel that he could neither support his family nor himself, the mother remains strong-willed. According to the exemplar model, placing in our memory many representations of category members mentally represents a certain category. If readers are exposed to such positive individuals as Marwan and his mother, they are more likely to construct a category to which they have favorable attitudes.

In the story of Marwan, the author also employs the theme of abandonment repeatedly. The father leaves his family to face barriers, such as the inability to gain goods or education and the poor conditions that compel his brother, Zakaria, and his family to leave their homes in an attempt to manage life on their own. Moreover, Marwan leaves his school that “taught nothing” in order to “plunge into the frying pan with everyone else” (43). It appears that the harsh conditions of Marwan’s family have driven them to break their family ties. The plight is not restricted to Marwan’s family only. The author displays the struggle of others through the words “frying pan,” indicating that everybody is struggling in order to meet their needs. The underlying point here is that poverty is sweeping Palestinians’ lives, creating family problems and driving many to desert their homeland.
The prototype view entails the existence of the set of shared features that are found in a category. Even though the features within the category are not applicable to all members, they tend to be typical of the category. The conception of Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan as normal individuals who strive to support their families while undergoing political and social certainties can lead to attitude change. Abu Qais leaves so he can support his family. Marwan leaves his to pursue his dream of supporting his mother and siblings after his father’s desertion. Assad leaves his homeland so he can have opportunity. These displacements resulted from the oppressive conditions of Palestinians that *Men in the Sun* attempts to capture. In this vein, Hilary Kilpatrick notes that not only does *Men in the Sun* “express the essence of the Palestinian problem in remarkably forthright terms but … [it is also a] lasting literary creation” (16). The destitution and struggle experienced by the three male protagonists—Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan—serve to symbolize the plight of thousands of Palestinians who attempt to pursue a better life, and represents the individual conflicts and harsh realities of the lives of many of the Palestinian people who have been forced to resort to exile. The story of these three Palestinians symbolizes the hope of many who “look for a new home, a new future, and ultimately a new identity” (Zalman 20). *Men in the Sun* shows the pain and suffering Palestinians undergo and devastatingly portrays how hope becomes loss. The story of the struggle in the Palestinians’ lives that is portrayed in the book, through which the author accentuates the humiliation and brutality of life that the Palestinians tackle, can elicit readers’ empathy and eventually change their perceptions towards Arabs.

In addition, one can argue that the knowledge about categories (schemas) can be stored in terms of some representations of greater similarities within a category (prototype) and also in terms of explicit stored instances (exemplar). Both approaches are useful in the provision of
conceptual representations of Arabs. However, there is empirical evidence in psychology about prototype and exemplar approaches to category representation demonstrating how an exemplar is easier and faster to acquire than prototype. For example, it is easier for people to classify an ostrich as a bird even though it is different from the prototype of bird. This pertains to categories whose members differ significantly from one another. In the prototype approach, people need enough time to conceptualize a prototype in a learning phase: comparing new stimuli with old ones to find the degree of typicality, whether they are already recognized or not. But even if the empirical evidence is in favor of the exemplar approach, literature can foster both. The example of Marwan can be stored in readers’ memories as an instance of the concept of Palestinian/Arab so that when they encounter new Palestinians they will classify them more quickly and less atypically. Schemas, exemplars, and prototypes are cognitive structures that function in our minds. Therefore, the construction of positive schemas and exposure to several positive exemplars or prototypes can lead to attitude change.

Creating Information-Processing Intervention

The previous section shows that Arabic literary characters (exemplars) may function as an ideal model that eventually improves readers’ images of Arabs and that positive characteristics of various Arabic characters (prototypes) in Men in the Sun may serve as a cognitive representation of the Arabs category. In addition to the use of exemplar and prototype, literature can help us look at readers as processors of information. As discussed in chapter one, people can take in information and organize it to be retrieved later—similar to how computers process information. Also, it has been noted that information processing undergoes three important stages: information registration (receiving information), pattern recognition (constructing a meaning through comparing new information to previously acquired information)
and, finally, rehearsal (maintaining the information in memory by repeating it). When reading *Men in the Sun*, readers can be repeatedly immersed in cognitive activities that lead them to develop adequate information-processing scripts. Readers’ attitudes can be improved through their understanding and interpretation of cues in *Men in the Sun*. However, the effective use of information-processing routines requires the integration of empathy. Kenneth Dodge points out that “emotion is the energy level that drives, organizes, amplifies, and attenuates cognitive activity and in turn is the experience and expression of this activity” (159). Emotions, thus, play a crucial role when they direct the readers’ cognitive processes.

The information-processing approach describes certain cognitive processes that can be imparted in readers of Arabic literature, and thus it has significant implications for designing interventions to promote a better understanding of Arabs and reduce negative attitudes toward outgroup members. The translation of information processing from perspective into practice has been successful in understanding aggression among children. However, despite advances in understanding the contribution of information processing to people’s behaviors, applying information processing in literature to reduce stereotyping and prejudice remains at the beginning stage. Mark Bracher contributes to literary studies and cognitive science when he argues that literature is competent to develop information-processing schemas that, when learned and done habitually, can produce positive change in readers’ appraisal of others. In “Schema Criticism,” Bracher writes, “the development of such automatic, habitual information-processing routines is a task for which literature is in many ways uniquely qualified, and such development can therefore constitute the core of an effective social justice pedagogy (367-8). Because the distinctive role of information processing has not been entirely recognized by intervention
researchers with regard to attitude change, this project, however, attempts to offer a framework for applying information processing to alter faulty information about Arabs.

The basic components in information processing are the encoding, rehearsal, and retrieval of information. In order to correct faulty information processing about Arabs, readers of Arabic literature need to integrate proper information into their memories and rehearse it in a series of repetitions so it can be activated (retrieved) in future social encounters. There are two distinct memory processes: short-term and long-term memories. Rowell Huesmann notes that short-term memory has “a very limited capacity” because it includes information that is presently being used but if the information is activated lengthily, it can be integrated into long-term memory (79). Thus, it is important that positive information about Arabs is maintained long enough in the readers’ short-term memories so that it can be converted into long-term memories and have stronger effects on the readers’ perceptions of Arabs. In order to provide a general framework for applying information processing to literature, it is important to look at the Dodge (1986) model of information processing that was subsequently reformulated (Crick & Dodge 1994).  

The Crick and Dodge model explains consecutive cognitive processes that people experience in social situations. This model shows that behavioral responses to social situations are the result of six overlapping cognitive steps. These steps include: (1) the encoding of external and internal cues; (2) the interpretation of those cues; (3) choosing and clarifying a goal; (4) accessing or constructing a response; (5) performing the response decision—which is guided by mental structures (e.g., social schema, scripts, and social knowledge) that one develops from accumulated memories of events and experiences; and (6) enacting the selected response. The initial model was criticized for ignoring the role of emotion on the cognitive processing. However, emotion was given significant attention in the reformulated model. Crick and Dodge
state that emotions are an essential part of each part of all information processing steps (81). Crick and Dodge give several examples to illustrate how emotions and cognition interact in their model. They write, “emotional arousal may serve as an internal cue that must be encoded…[and] prior-existing arousal states can alter…[people’s] accuracy in making social interpretations” (81). The Crick and Dodge model helps us understand how one behaves in a social interaction. The behavioral response one makes comes as a result of processing cues. Thus, information about Arabs can be processed using cues found in *Men in the Sun*.

Faulty information about Arabs includes attributing negative images that can lead to dehumanizing them. The concept of dehumanization means, as Daniel Bar-Tal observes, “labeling a group as inhuman, either by reference to subhuman categories … or by referring to negatively valued superhuman creatures such as demons, monsters, and satans” (122). *Men in the Sun* offers a humane portrayal of Arabs that can eventually improve the way they are perceived among outgroup members. The main theme presented in *Men in the Sun* is the struggle for a better life—from poverty to well-being. From the very beginning, readers learn that life of Palestinians is difficult, especially in the ways Abu Qais remembers his teacher, Selim, and draws a desolate picture of how he lived before he embarked on his journey. The author writes:

The mercy of God be upon you, Ustaz Selim, the mercy be God be upon you…The mercy of God be upon you, Ustaz Selim. If you had lived, if you had been drowned by poverty as I have, I wonder if you would have done what I am doing now. Would you have been willing to carry all your years on your shoulders and flee across the desert to Kuwait to find a crust of bread? (23-24)
Abu Qais’s reminiscence of Ustaz Selim embodies the disastrous effects of poverty. Ahmad Sadi notes that Abu Qais’s “sudden awareness of his reality as a lonely destitute refugee” makes him torn between the past’s honor and stability and the present’s “humiliation” and “wretchedness” (183). Abu Qais is in extreme distress, as evidenced by his glorification of his teacher’s death after which he asks, “God, is there any divine favor greater than that?” His pain is further apparent in his escape from poverty. As recalled earlier, the role of information processing in modifying people’s faulty knowledge about Arabs can be enhanced by the inclusion of empathy. The distress cues observed in Abu Qais’s story could lead to the elicitation of the readers’ empathy, which in turn can be used to engage readers in mental operations that include adequate human schemas. However, these mental operations need to be repeated for an attitude change to become effective. In conclusion, using an information-processing approach in Men in the Sun involves using distress cues to elicit readers’ empathy and then provide the readers with information that is then stored, retrieved, and transformed to influence behavior.

**Creating Adequate Scripts from Men in the Sun**

As noted in chapter one, one form of schema is the script which represents the knowledge of the stereotyped event sequences in common situations. People have scripts for social situations such as going to a hospital or a bank. Schank and Abelson note that scripts make people use prior knowledge to create expectations about what kinds of behaviors will be used (201). Research on the representations of Arabs shows that there is an array of negative scripts associated with Arabs. Examples are representations of Arabs as terrorists, barbaric, cruel, treacherous, warlike, and mistreaters of women. People can acquire faulty information from media and use this information to construct scripts that make things easier for them cognitively. In order to illustrate how readers can build an adequate script, this section provides an
application of the “helper” script to mitigate the stereotypes of Arabs. In script terms, the events in *Men in the Sun* reveal a helping behavior as practiced by several characters in the novella. *Men in the Sun* reflects the power of family in the characters’ lives and the desperate measures people are willing to take to escape the hardship in their homeland in order to support their families. The journey to Kuwait becomes possible with the help of others who attempt to improve the welfare of the protagonists. While Abu Qais and Marwan’s decision to seek work away from their homeland is supported by their families, Assad does not have parents on which he can rely. However, Assad borrows the money he needs for the journey from his uncle who wants to help him so he can marry him off to his daughter. The uncle provides financial help to Assad so he can gain a better future. With the money they dream to gain, the protagonists aspire to help their families. Marwan wants to help his mother and siblings after his father’s desertion. Abu Qais has a glimpse of what Kuwait will offer him and dreams that he will be able to send his son, Qais, back to school, buy a few olive shoots to provide the family with an additional source of income and build their own place.

Moreover, Abul Khaizuran’s story has fascinated many critics who have found several allegorical uses in the tragic dimensions of his tale. Zalamn believes that Abul Khaizuran’s castration is “transformed into a symbolic rather than a historical event in the narrative” (25). Abul Khaizuran makes up for the loss of his manhood—his masculinity—by helping the men in the story and, thus, getting valued for his efforts to support his identity needs. In *Radical Pedagogy: Identity, Generativity, and Social Transformation* (2006), Mark Bracher conceptualizes one’s identity needs as, “the need for recognition, the needs to have one’s being appreciated and validated, or at least acknowledged…” (7). Through driving the three men, Abul Khaizuran attempts to retain his identity and save his fellows from the hardship of their
homeland despite the fact that the job carries a high risk with a cheap price. He even asks the three men to pay him after they safely reach Kuwait. This arrangement symbolizes how Abul Khaizuran attempts to do at his abilities to help others and, by that, help himself, as Bracher explains, “Because the need for recognition is so fundamental, people often devote considerable energy to eliciting and controlling recognition from others” (Radical Pedagogy 8).

**Correcting Faulty Theory of Causality**

The previous section has been concerned with using *Men in the Sun* to provide positive exemplars, prototypes, and information-processing activities to dismantle the negative ones. In order to promote such positive models, the integration of empathy is essential to guide the readers’ cognitive processes. The ascription of negative stereotypes to Arabs is damaging indeed. However, in order to mitigate the harm of stereotypes, it is imperative to address the other elements of the stereotypes. One important element that needs to be tackled is the faulty theory of causality. It has been noted that judging others involves attributing negative traits or behaviors to internal causes. Stereotypes of Arabs become dangerous when stereotypers attribute internal factors to Arabs when explaining their negative traits or behaviors. Stewart and many other critics claim that when individuals assign the negative behaviors of outgroup members to internal factors—or what is known as ultimate attribution error (UAE)—they are perpetuating outgroup stereotypes (221). The identification of such faulty attribution that stereotypers make can be corrected through directing their attention to environmental factors which would eventually help reduce stereotypes and prejudice. *Men in the Sun* can help reduce bias toward Arabs when it is used as a tool to train readers to strengthen situational attribution for Arabs’ negative behaviors rather than make judgments.
In his reading of *Men in the Sun*, Elias Khoury notes that “the symbols are clear and evident. The Palestinian people die every day in the tank without crying out; it falls upon the land to cry out now” (174). *Men in the Sun* offers many insights into the characters’ struggle throughout the novella. For instance, the road the protagonists take during their migrations from Palestine plays an important role in symbolizing their route to freedom even though the route is dangerous, as the risk of death is always factored into the men’s journey. As the three men travel through the road, ugly images of patrons abandoned by smugglers surface. Moreover, Barakat believes that the tank in which the men hide serves to symbolize a “modern Jonah’s whale” (501). Barakat also states that security officials who have delayed Abul Khaizuran at the frontier may represent Arab rulers (501). The security officials engage in trivialities while Palestinians are suffering. The understanding of the external forces (situational attribution) is therefore fundamental in our understanding of the stereotypes of Arabs.

**Correcting Ingroup-Outgroup Bias**

In order to maintain a positive self-esteem and identity, individuals tend to assess their own group favorably in comparison to other groups. Individuals may have negative feelings or attitudes towards another group. While ingroup favoritism offers a sense of belonging and connection, it can cause damage when people disparage outgroup members and assume that the negative traits are intrinsic to the group members. However, the damage caused by such bias can be lessened through a modification of the individuals’ schemas in ways that help them become more favorably inclined towards the members of other groups. This modification does not mean that the perceivers associate less desirable and positive traits to their group. Rather, it means that the similarities between groups are highlighted and understood. In order to effectively get the desired goals, people’s empathy need to be elicited so that their cognitive processes can be
directed and modified. Through *Men in the Sun*, the elicitation of readers’ empathy directs their attention to positive traits of Arabs and the similarity between distinct groups. The recognition of such similarity mitigates the harm caused by negative stereotyping.

The story of Assad’s first attempt to go to Kuwait can be used as an example to illustrate how one can bridge the prejudices and focus on the similarity rather than uniqueness of the self. Assad’s first attempt to migrate has failed because the guide abandoned him after he made him get out of the truck telling him that he had to walk around one of the pumping stations on the Iraqi pipeline. Assad was coincidentally picked up a tourist couple. Kanafani’s description of Assad’s first experience after getting out of the truck can be used to elicit readers’ empathy. He writes:

> The sun was pouring flame down on his head, and as he climbed the yellow slopes, he felt he was alone in the whole world. He dragged his feet over the sand as though he were walking on the seashore after pulling up a heavy boat that had drained the firmness from his legs. He crossed hard patches of brown rocks like splinters, climbed low hills with flattened tops of soft yellow earth like flour. (31)

The encounter between Assad and the tourist couple demonstrates such understanding. Not only does the tourist couple save Assad, but they sympathize with him after he had been left in a blistering desert where he spent hours struggling. The couple understands Assad’s situation and this understanding becomes evident when the couple engages in a conversation about rats. While the husband is driving, the wife sees rats and is surprised at the number. She asks, “What on earth do they eat?” (35) Her husband immediately answers saying that they eat smaller rats (35). The talk about rats may have a metaphorical meaning or ironic use. Rats could be the people who take advantage of distressed people. Because some people may have a sense of
power, they feed on smaller, vulnerable beings. In this vein, Barbara Harlow states that Kanfani’s *Men in the Sun* attempts to be “dichotomized into the cultural and the political.” The remark about rats can also reflect how the human world is more like the animal world where the strong eat the weak. This perception is not unique to Assad or the group to which he belongs (Arabs). Outgroup members may evaluate this situation and be less likely distinguish to their group from others.

**Conclusion**

The damage caused by the stereotypes of Arab, as noted, involves not only attributing negative images to Arabs, but also using dispositional factors to explain their negative behaviors, assuming that the negative traits are unique to them, and distinguishing the stereotypers’ own group and Arabs. The understanding of these elements is essential to establishing a mechanism where literature can ameliorate the animosity between groups. Readers of *Men in the Sun* who have a strong tendency to favor their ingroup in terms of their attitudes, beliefs, and behavior are invited to understand Arabs in order to ameliorate the stereotypical images ascribed to them. The improvement of people’s perceptions towards Arabs entails the correction of stereotypes.

Moreover, because the stereotypes of Arabs can take a script form that has a strong influence on people’s behaviors, negative scripts can be replaced with positive ones (e.g., helping script). The activation of more positive schemas allows the perceivers to have more positive attitudes toward Arabs so they can be retrieved later in social interactions.
CHAPTER FIVE
IMPROVING ATTITUDES THROUGH THEY DIE STRANGERS

There are two reasons why Mohammed Abdul-Wali’s novella They Die Strangers is an efficient tool through which negative images of Arabs can be alleviated. First, it encompasses not only empathy-eliciting elements that can improve readers’ perception of Arabs, but also discusses wider issues that pertain to all men and women who experience solitary lives in their own communities. They Die Strangers depicts the struggle poor and marginalized immigrants suffer while portraying the concept of loneliness people may feel at any given time during their lives, appealing to the reader’s sense of humanity.149 The novella takes place in a critical period in Yemen’s history during which the North Yemen Civil War (1962-1970) was fought, with several Arab nations were involved in the struggle. The trauma of war and its psychological and economic impact on the individual provides a means of changing people’s perceptions of Arabs.

They Die Strangers provides important tools that can be used to develop schemas about Yemeni Arabs. The underlying purpose of the novella is to make readers recognize the Yemeni suffering, eliciting emotional responses that would eventually alter their cognitive schemas.150 However, reading works such as They Die Strangers does not suffice unless done with direction because several behaviors, situations, and events can reinforce negative stereotypes. In order for the story to evoke the desired changes in schemas, readers need to be directed to the conditions that have led individuals to have behavioral flaws so the damage can be reduced. They Die Strangers provides adequate information about the environmental circumstances that contextualize characters’ negative behaviors.
A Brief Overview of *They Die Strangers*

*They Die Strangers* tells the story of the protagonist Abdou Said who leaves his family in Yemen to seek work in Ethiopia, in order to support them. He works hard as a storekeeper in Sodest Kilo and sends the money he earns to Yemen. The shop he owns is very small, but it is also his home in which he sleeps. Abdou is not happy in Sodest Kilo because he is far from the people he loves. The war in his homeland that has led many to seek work elsewhere appears to have created this dissatisfaction. In Ethiopia, Abdou emerges as a respected individual, as people in the neighborhood where he lives treat him as one of them. Even though he appears a devout Muslim who regularly prays and does not consume alcohol, Abdou engages in many adulterous relationships with prostitutes. Allegedly, he has an illegitimate child with one of the prostitutes, who dies and leaves the child, shifting Abdou’s life drastically. It may surprise some readers that Abdou chooses to seek work in a country that has always been considered as one of the poorest in the world. Farhan Mohammed states that the “idea of Ethiopia as a land of opportunity may strike some readers as strange, but clearly at that time it was just like that for some” (3). During the 1950s and 1960s, many Yemenis migrated to Ethiopia to escape poverty and oppression in their homeland, and some of these émigrés married Ethiopian women and had children. These children were called *muwallad* (children of mixed blood). The story ends tragically. One night, Abdou forgets to turn off his stove, causing him to inhale a huge amount of carbon dioxide while sleeping. Abdou is given a funeral in Ethiopia.

**Eliciting Readers’ Empathy**

As noted earlier, emotions results from the three basic appraisals: (1) when observers understand that one is suffering, he or she does not deserve to be suffering, and, that the suffering highlights the other’s common humanity (Bracher, “How to Teach for Social Justice” 366-7).
They Die Strangers can be used to expose these elements and direct readers’ attention to them in order to invoke their empathetic responses. The story is about Yemeni immigrants, but it calls attention to the plight of many immigrants across the world who end up virtually unknown in strange places despite their dreams and hopes of gaining success.\textsuperscript{153} The story can convey a richer understanding of the loss of identity one experiences when attempting to integrate into a new society. The experience of empathy differs from reader to reader as a result of their perceptions and experiences. Hence, the provision of multiple cues provides rich opportunities for inducing empathy. They Die Strangers can engage its readers in the three empathy-arousing modes: emotional contagion, direct association, and role taking. The novella offers multiple episodes where readers can automatically and uncontrollably catch the emotions of the characters, recall similar emotional experiences, or imagine a character’s position. However, after the elicitation of readers’ empathy, the readers’ cognitive processes can be guided to create more adequate schemas to replace the faulty ones. The modification of faulty schemas involves the provision of admired exemplars and prototypes, and proper information-processing scripts.

**Emotional Contagion**

One way of understanding empathy is to look at emotional contagion which is defined as, “the tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person's and, consequently, to converge emotionally.”\textsuperscript{154} Such empathetic responses require readers to be affected by a character’s emotional state. Humans imitate the expressions of others by bringing associated emotion that is used by the observed, as Adam Smith observes:

Though our brother is upon the rack . . . by the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it
were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. (9)

While emotional contagion involves seeing the target, Daniel Goleman notes that hearing a story that is told vividly “has the same emotional impact as seeing the act itself” (53). In literature, the main idea behind emotional contagion is that emotions, both positive and negative, can spread among readers like viruses. This type of interpersonal influence is significant because if readers catch the emotions of characters, they are given a chance to be empathic with them, which leads them to have positive attitudes towards the character or person being observed. They Die Strangers provides several episodes where characters engage in emotional expressions that allow readers to be influenced emotionally. One example is Abdou’s emotions when he receives letters from his family. Abdou has known very little about his family from the letters that he receives twice or three times a year. He gets very happy when receiving a letter “despite the long periods of waiting” (27). The letters bring happiness and joy to him because, when he opens them, he feels attached to his homeland, as if he has never left. Sometimes, the letters cause Abdou tears of happiness. Psychologists say that crying tears of joy occurs by “responding to an overwhelmingly positive emotion with a negative one.” This incident happens when Abdou receives from home a letter, where pictures of his new house were included. The narrator states, “The new house was the village’s bride, the letter said; it could be seen from a distance, it was beautiful. Tears streamed down Abdou Said’s face…” (28). Abdou is extremely happy that the money he has been sending helped build the house. According to the concept of emotional contagion, readers are likely to synchronize the emotions of happiness that Abdou is
experiencing because our brains automatically make us feel what the other feels, as Hoffman asserts (37).

Emotional contagion is a significant feature of readers’ emotional engagement with the characters. Unlike direct association and role taking, emotional contagion does not require having a similar experience or taking the position of the target. This particular mode of empathy is very important because it is automatic, involuntary, unintentional, and uncontrollable. Lauren Wispe argues that, “emotional contagion involves an involuntary spread of feelings without any conscious awareness of where the feelings began in the first place” (7). The basic processes in emotional contagion are motor mimicry and the feedback from mimicry. Hoffman explains:

The observer first automatically imitates and synchronizes changes in his facial expression, voice, and posture with the slightest changes in his facial expression, voice, and postural expressions of feeling…the resulting changes in the observer’s facial, vocal, and postural musculature then trigger afferent feedback which produces feelings in the observer that match feelings of the victim. (37)

Empirical research on motor mimicry has shown that people tend to automatically mimic the expressions and behavior of individuals they observe. Examples of such mimicking include expressions of pain, happiness, affection, fears, and more. Emotional contagion occurs not through mimicry alone. The feedback from this mimicry influences the observer’s emotional experience and elicits empathetic responses. They Die Strangers provides several occasions where the effects of mimicry emerge. One significant example is the effect that the appearance of Abdou’s grandmother has on him. Abdou suffered two tragic losses. Abdou has never known his mother and has lost his grandmother, whose presence seemed to offer a sense of motherhood
to him. While the loss of both women is crucial to the structure of Abdou’s upbringing, the death of his grandmother is more central to him, as he clearly recalls the incident:

He still remembered the sound of death rattling in her throat as she lay in a corner of her room, saying, “Son, I’ll get over this quickly and be well again soon.” But that wasn’t to be. She died without saying a word, her throat constricted. He was asleep by her side; when he awoke in the morning he felt her bony hands digging into his ribs. He had said to her, unwittingly, “Grandma, Grandma…you’re hurting me.” (25)

This vivid description of the grandmother’s postures, body movements, and speech seems to have left a vivid mark on Abdou’s life. This passage can have the same emotional influence as seeing the act itself. Moreover, understanding how the absence of a mother affects a child’s life is useful in this context in order for us to have powerful emotional responses. Dora Black, a child and adolescent psychiatrist, states “[F]or optimal emotional, social, and psychosexual development to occur, children need a warm, secure, affectionate, individualized, and continuous experience of care from a few caretakers who interact with them in a sensitive way and who can live in harmony with each other.”157 Abdou’s grandmother appears to have soothed him for quite some time. But she knew that if she died, Abdou would be more vulnerable to life’s cruelty even though his father was around. She knew that her presence was essential in Abdou’s life. These were the reasons why her words—“Son, I’ll get over this quickly and be well again soon”—intended to offer a sense of assurance to Abdou. But Abdou was bereaved very early and was, therefore, prone to experience psychiatric dysfunction. Studies show that children who are bereaved early are more likely to have psychiatric problems in their life.158
Another instance of emotional contagion is the sympathy that the appearance of the helpless child has on the Secretary. The narrator describes the emotions the Secretary feels for the child by writing, “he harbored no ill feelings toward this child…in fact, he loved the boy” (56). While readers are not seeing characters’ facial expressions or body movements, in a variety of occasions, They Die Strangers produces emotional responses when readers’ attention is directed to verbal description of the characters’ emotional states. In this sense, as Hoffman argues, language can be “the mediator or link between the model’s feeling and the observer’s experience” (49). While reading about the characters’ emotional states, readers can invoke visual images of these incidents and respond empathically to them (50). An example of such experiences is the expressions of kindness on Abdou’s face. The locals appreciate Abdou’s presence because he always treats them kindly and never takes off the smile from his face. Abdou’s expression is “a constant mask of affability”(17). Another notable instance of emotional contagion is the facial expression of Abdou’s wife that influences the protagonist when he contemplates the life he has been missing in Yemen. The emotional contagion is apparent in this passage of the book: “[H]e remembered her as he left her twenty-two years old, young, quiet, a simple expression on her innocent face. He sometimes smiled as he struggled to imagine her now…she was a different type, ‘pure like his country’ ” (30).

In sum, They Die Strangers thus offers cues where readers can experience involuntary and affective responses to a narrative. While empathy is best identified as a complex and imaginative process that requires the integration of both cognition and affect, the uncontrollable facial mimicry and feedback involves less sophisticated processes than direct association and role taking. When a reader empathizes with a character, he or she takes on the character’s
emotional states without catching the character’s psychological perspective, which involves the character’s cognitive sense of distress.

**Producing Empathy Through Direct Association and Role Taking**

Direct association and role taking are other means through which *They Die Strangers* can evoke empathetic responses in its readers. Using the two empathy-arousing modes, one can discuss many occasions in *They Die Strangers* in which the experiences of characters can remind the readers of similar ones in the past (direct association) leading to the elicitation of the readers’ emotions. One notable instance is Abdou’s experience of loneliness through which the writer aims to show the solitary life one can live even if people surround him or her. Even though Abdou interacts with people, he is spiritually isolated. As the author writes, “he lives among them but apart, like the distance between his dirty black clothes and his smiling white face” (17). The loneliness of Abdou’s soul is embedded in his detachment from people whose presence is nothing but the “dirty black clothes” that he is wearing. The emotion of readers who have had similar experiences can easily be evoked. Mary Hanemann Lystad notes that alienation is “a sign of personal dissatisfaction” that is linked particularly to “economic and political elements” (90). When readers observe this experience of distress in Abdou’s story, they can recall unhappy times when they were far from the people they loved. While the war in Abdou’s homeland that has led many to seek work elsewhere appears to have created Abdou’s dissatisfaction, it is enough that readers have had experiences in which they choose to alienate themselves because they felt they were different even if people loved them or because they felt they didn’t belong to the places in which they lived.

*They Die Strangers* also offers episodes where readers’ empathy can be elicited through imagining themselves in a character’s position (role taking). Like *Men in the Sun*, the
understanding of the historical, economic, cultural, and social conditions of the characters can enhance the readers’ empathy. Because role taking can be successful in eliciting people’s empathy, being in a character’s place yields positive results concerning stereotype and prejudice reduction. One example is being in the position of Abdou’s father when his only son informs him of his decision to leave home. The author writes:

“What about our land, Abdou?”
“You can take care of it.”
“But I’m getting old.”
“My wife will help you. I’ll work there and send you money to hire men to help.”

His father wanted him to stay, but he wanted him to emigrate, too. He was unable to decide. But Abdou Said made up his own mind.

“Father, I’m waiting for your blessing”
“If you insist, I’ll pray for you. May God take care of you, help you, and bring you success.” (27)

Through the above lines, the author reveals the juxtaposition of fear and desire. In They Die Strangers, the father knows that, due to his old age, he will not be able to take care of the family’s land. However, he doesn’t want to stand in his son’s way. The decision to emigrate is a tough one, not only on Abdou but also on his father. Research shows that migration causes changes to a family and destabilizes its relations over time. The above lines can function as a good example through which readers can empathize with other people’s predicament. Imagining oneself in the position of an old man who expresses shock and confusion at his son’s decision can invoke readers’ emotions towards people’s difficult situations.
Another significant case of role taking is being in the position of the Secretary whom the author represents as “a rootless tree; he was no one. Yes, no one” (46). Because each of his parents comes from a different race, the Secretary appears to have lost his identity, reflecting the uncertain quality of his social status. This uncertainty may have derived from the Secretary’s biracial origin which usually creates dilemma in people. Anne Wilson argues that mixed race people frequently inhabit “an ambiguity of social position” (46). Because the Secretary does not have a country to which he adheres, he is a stranger. Not only is he a mixed race individual, but he is also presented namelessly. The author does not give him a name in an attempt to highlight the dissociative damage emigration brings to his life. The Secretary is neither Yemeni nor Ethiopian. He is what people call a “half-breed.” Apart from the stories he hears from his father, he cannot identify himself with Yemen because he was not born there and has never seen it.

Engaging in the process of taking the role of the Secretary makes the character’s own feelings and thoughts more like the readers’ feelings and thoughts. Davis, Conklin, Smith, and Charles note that “the target representation constructed by an observer during role taking will more closely resemble the observer's own self-representation” (713-714). Hence, being in a character’s shoes, such as the Secretary’s, yields shared mental representations and leads the readers to invoke emotional responses with the text.

Providing Positive Exemplars and Prototypes

Schemas become faulty not only when they include incorrect knowledge about social groups but also when significant information is missing. They Die Strangers presents humanizing and positive knowledge about Arabs that serve to improve the perceptions of these populations among outgroup members. Such knowledge involves delivering adequate, symbolic representations (exemplars) of Arabs. One example that is representative of Arab category is
Abdou’s wife who appears strong and courageous. She has raised a child alone and worked on the family’s farm supporting Abdou’s father. Another notable example is Sayyid Amin who is presented wise, caring, and devout, whom both Muslims and Christians frequently visit to solve their problems. When a prostitute seeks his help, Amin displays no prejudicial attitude, which makes Ta’atto feel not only relieved, but also more content in confessing her sins. To her, Amin appears as a “father,” “priest,” and “divine messenger” (40). Another example is Abdul Latif, a well-respected person and community leader who shows enthusiasm, sympathy, and care to save a child. These instances and others can be selected as examples of members belonging to the Arab category. However, one instance is not enough for the exemplars to be stored in memory. The more readers encounter such examples; the more exemplars of Arab category will be kept in their memory.

_They Die Strangers_ can also offer cognitive representations of features within the Yemeni category (prototype). As noted before, these features are not applicable to all people in the category, but they can be representative of the category. The most significant example of prototype is the case of émigrés. Through _They Die Strangers_, Abdul-Wali utilizes an intriguing approach to the subject of immigration. Weir notes that the story “dwells on the negative aspects of long-term emigration: the anguish of long separations from families and homeland, the loneliness and moral hazards of living in an alien cultural setting, and the tension between the immigrant’s desire to assimilate in the host country and yearning to return.”

_They Die Strangers_ illustrates these different kinds of trauma that result from immigration. For Abdou, the original traumatizing event is his long estrangement from everything he loves. Frahan Mohammed writes: “Abdou lives the life of an animal to save every penny and send it home so that one day he might enjoy the dreamed of kind of prosperity in his village”(24). For the
Secretary, it is the loss of identity in the middle of political struggle. For Abdul Latif and many Yemeni immigrants, the trauma resides in their fight against injustice and oppression. It is almost as if everybody is suffering in They Die Strangers. Even Amin, who has been striving to preserve his closeness to God, struggles in his detachment from the world. The trauma of leaving is the crucial one. Abdul-Wali frames the story around departure. Yeminis leave their homeland due to the harsh conditions of life there. Their departure has brought loss of families, lands, identities, ideals, religion, and more. The irony is in their dreams in which the author merges two worlds: reality and delusion. However, apart from the Secretary, it seems that no one can accept bitter reality.

*They Die Strangers* thus can offer its readers adequate knowledge about Arabs that can be stored in their memories as either representations of similarities within Arabs (prototype) or as positive depictions of Arabs (exemplars). The provision of such adequate representations constitutes schemas and the frequent exposure to multiple positive exemplars or prototypes are likely to yield attitude changes. If the faulty schemas that readers may have of Arabs are replaced with ones from *They Die Strangers*, the readers’ perception of Arabs are more likely to be positive. Eventually, when the categorization of Yemenis/Arabs takes place, readers are able to have access to new stored schemas and use them in their interactions with them.

**Building Information-Processing Intervention**

*They Die Strangers* can also provide useful information about Arabs that readers retrieve later in social encounters. When building an information-processing intervention for an attitude change towards Arabs, readers undergo three steps: registering data from the text, rehearsing it, and retrieving the registered data in future encounters (behavioral responses). *They Die Strangers* contains a lot of relevant information about Arabs from which readers can draw and process their
understanding of the text. However, in order for the information not to be deleted from memory, readers need to be repeatedly involved in a number of different information processes. One example is registering information about how Yemeni émigrés have been struggling in order to seek political, social, financial, and cultural stability. *They Die Strangers* provides input for such information, which can then be stored and eventually brought back by readers outside the text. The mechanism under which readers can process the data can be presented as follows:

1. **Information Input:** examples include the impact of war, value of family, the subject of helping others, the theme of estrangement, and so on.
2. **Information Storage:** repeating the presented information several times so it can be saved in long-term memory.
3. **Output:** retrieving the information when the appropriate environmental cues are available.

The information-processing approach is more efficient when scripts are employed. Scripts can provide implications for improving attitudes towards Arabs. Having prior knowledge of event sequences can facilitate the understanding of outgroup members. If readers of *They Die Strangers* possess organized scripts about Arabs that enable them to behave in a positive way, the outcome is more likely to reduce stereotype and prejudice. Readers can learn from experiences in the novella and use them cognitively to construct scripts that make things easier for them when they eventually meet an actual member of the group. One of the images that is widely associated with Arabs is how wealthy they are and how they enjoy a high standard of living.162 This view does not consider the many socioeconomic levels at which Arabs live. *They Die Strangers* can build the “suffering” script in order to alleviate such a stereotype. While the
story revolves around hardship and the desperate measures one is willing to take to find financial or political stability, the most notable instance of such torment is Abdou who suffered wordlessly in his life while hiding his distress from people around him.

Right at the end of the story, a momentous discussion between a doctor, who witnesses Abdou’s death, and his nurse displays the agony Abdou has been feeling. The nurse tells her doctor that those migrants leave their homes and families to “chase after living” (64). The doctor believes that people should not leave their home in search of material success. They should stay in their homeland and endure hardships with others. However, the choice to remain in poverty and political uncertainty is a tough one to make. Mohammed Al-Jumly notes that during that period (the 1960’s), instability plagued Yemen while poverty forced thousands to leave their homeland. Therefore, even though Abdou is dead, the narrator speaks on his behalf in an attempt to defend the departed’s dream. The author writes: “unfortunately Abdou Said could not hear this conversation [between the doctor and nurse]. If he could, he would have opened his eyes, amazed. What were these crazy people talking about? He would have told them of the fabulous world of his dreams, the one that has become his alone and forever. It was better than anything they could ever hope to create” (64). Through these lines, the author aims to keep Abdou’s dream alive. Even if he is gone, his aspiration remains eternal. Moreover, when people gather to bid their farewell, the Secretary brings his recently-adopted child to the funeral and in a critical voice, he says “you know when he died he left nothing behind. A woman deserted for years there, a son he didn’t know about, a land to which he didn’t offer a drop of his blood. He died like a stranger, like hundreds of Yemenis die in other lands. As for this grave—it’s not his. It’s not his land; it belongs to other people, to the Ethiopians…Oh God, we are such strangers!” (65). Moreover, the Secretary believes that Abdou has dedicated his life to nothing. Abdou left
his wife, son, father, and land and struggled to maintain his links with them. He constantly
worked, hoping that one day he would return as a wealthy man; but he never did. Moreover, in
his sojourn, Abdou did not assimilate into the host culture. Weir notes: “His obsession with his
goals makes him shun any relationships that might enmesh him in the local community,
including those with Yemenis.” Abdou’s plan to return fails. He dies as a stranger in a strange
land. Even the grave where he is buried is not truly his, reflecting the author’s portrayal of how
an émigré who chases materialistic goals will suffer from a lonely and tragic life.

Scripts have dual roles in psychology since they determine one’s propensity to
understand and behave towards Arabs in certain ways. Robert Abelson argues that one can either
“behave a script, that is, to take a role such as customer in a restaurant” or understand a situation
which means “the cognitive retrieval of previous situations to which the present situation is
similar” (719). The suffering of Abdou that They Die Strangers highlights can be used to form a
useful script that readers may activate when they expect events in the sequence to occur outside
the text. As noted earlier, feeling indifferent to the suffering of Abdou—or other characters—is a
result of the observer’s perception that those characters are entirely different from themselves
which leads them to believe that such characters do not suffer and/or the suffering is deserved. In
Bracher notes that prototypes, exemplars, and information-processing routines “can produce the
perception that the Other bears no similarity to oneself and thus also facilitate the judgment that
the Other is not suffering and/or that the Other deserves to suffer” (17). An example of such
perception is evident; Bracher goes on to explain, in “the various forms of Western prototype of
Africans and how they deny Westerners’ sameness with Africans” (17). The prevention of such
dehumanization entails the correction of people’s faulty perceptions of outgroup members by
providing adequate knowledge that highlights observers’ sameness with the dehumanized victims and, hence, evaluate their behaviors more favorably.

**Overcoming Ingroup-Outgroup Bias**

It has been shown that people tend to favor their groups (ingroup favoritism) and, by doing so, build up their self-esteem and identity. The problem with such favoritism is not that people prefer their groups over others, but that people often hold negative views of outgroup individuals (outgroup derogation). Although ingroup favoritism is useful in terms of providing a sense of belonging, it creates a social problem when one believes that his or her group is superior to other groups and assumes that the negative attributes are distinctive of the outgroups (distinctiveness). *They Die Strangers* can reduce the harm produced by such bias by directing readers’ attention to the similarities between groups. There is empirical evidence that shows how establishing common ground is effective in promoting intergroup connections. In their study that was conducted at the football stadium of the University of Delaware before a game between this school and Westchester State University, Nier, Gaertner, Dovidio, Banker, and Ward asked Black and White participants, who wore either a University of Delaware or a Westchester State hat, to interview White fans from both universities about their food likings.\(^{165}\) Results showed that White fans were more likely to assist a Black interviewer who wore their university hat than a Black interviewer from the other university. No significant difference was shown in terms of the White fans likelihood of helping a White interviewer from a rival university.

The above study is significant because it supports the idea that outgroup members can be perceived more favorably when they share a common identity. *They die Strangers* offers in several episodic themes that serve to highlight how common beliefs, values, and identity are
shared between social groups members and how devaluing outgroup members can be avoided. Examples of such similarity can be obtained from various incidents in the novella.

- Working hard for many years to guarantee a prosperous life for one’s family in future: when Abdou states, “how much I suffer, how I kill myself working… I would like to live in my home again. I would like to die after I’ve done good things for my son and wife” (37).

- Building the dream house: when Abdou visions that he “prays every morning on the roof of his new house so that the village people could see him…[he goes] to the garden to pick from his fruit…[and that people] would say, ‘Whose house is this?’ ‘Oh! What a great house!’” (34).

- The idea that no one is perfect and that one may defile certain beliefs: “Oh God, I’ll perform Hajj and repent for all my sins and will stay pious to the end of my life” (53).

**How They Die Strangers Can Rectify the Faulty Theory of Causality**

The alleviation of the harm caused by stereotyping Arab also requires directing the readers’ attention to the faulty theory of causality. Throughout *The Die Strangers*, the author shows on several occasions how forces beyond one’s control can negatively influence individuals’ behavior. Examples include how women are forced into prostitution by poverty or abandonment, how estrangement leads one to fail to assimilate and become a community member, and how alienation drives one to behave contradictorily in social conditions. Such images can be problematic if attributed to internal factors; that is one may believe that individuals behave in a negative way because of their race, religion, or characteristics. However, the faulty attribution can be corrected when readers are trained to consider situational factors when explaining the negative behavior of outgroup members. The case of the main protagonist,
Abdou, is a significant example that can be used to discuss how the faulty theory of causality can be corrected.

The most notable negative behavior of Abdou is his extramarital affairs. Abdou flirts with women when customers are crowding the shop. The author writes: “…he’d find the time to wink at a beautiful woman or pinch a young girl’s breast. He might even take delights in flirting with an old woman” (19). Abdou exhibits hypersexuality towards women. One may attribute Abdou’s negative behavior to his internal characteristics without considering situational factors. Such attribution does not help one understand Abdu’s behavioral problems. In *Social Symptoms of Identity Needs* (2009), Mark Bracher states that “…attribution of problematic behaviors to character faults and/or moral deficiencies provides little explanation of the causes of the behaviors” (11). The understanding of the role of external forces in explaining one’s harmful behaviors is crucial because it yields a more comprehensive account of the nature of behavioral problems which may eventually can lead to an effective intervention. Experiences, especially traumatic events, influence a person’s life and can cause one to change his or her character traits. The author displays how Abdou’s behaviors have been influenced due to the impact of several traumatic events that have occurred in his life.

First, Abdou never knew his mother because he was a child when an epidemic struck his village, killing many people including his mother. Abdou also lost his grandmother and, thus, grew up without having an older mother figure. Even after spending years away from his homeland, Abdou cherishes the moments he spent with his grandmother: “He still remembered the bread his grandmother used to make, spiced with fenugreek seeds, how delicious the bread was with fenugreek pudding or sometimes with porridge with yoghurt and ghee in it. Those were the days” (25). Second, Abdou got married at a very young age. He was fifteen and was unaware of how common arranged marriages were in rural and impoverished areas, where boys and girls
had no option but to wed whomever their parents choose. Early marriage, especially when it is
accompanied by early first birth, makes a person more exposed to the shackles of life problems.
Kristin Moore, a scholar and director of Child Trends, a youth development research center and
social psychologist Linda J. Waite assert that “the social and economic difficulties posed by the
combination of early marriage plus parenthood are …unlike those experienced by an older
couple faced with an untimely pregnancy” (22). Finally, and most importantly, Abdou’s
separation from his family leaves a vivid mark on his character and changes him drastically.

Abdou’s marriage made it very difficult for his family to break out of the cycle of
poverty. Abdou understands this fact later, and that awareness leads him to leave Yemen after he
and his wife have a child. People in the village often talk about an émigré who has sent a lot of
money to his family in Yemen, asking them to build a three-story residence for him. This news
has spread to almost every wife in the village, creating resentment among couples. The narrator
describes this jealous environment by writing that wives often talk about the émigré, saying, “I
wish I were his wife” (26). Abdou has tried to drown his feelings of incompetence because of the
talk about the wealthy émigré, but he fails to hide them when his son manages to make him
omnipresent and immanent in reality. After a wealthy émigré has returned to his newly built
house in Yemen, everyone in the village goes to see him, including the children. Abdou’s son is
among those who have gone to celebrate this occasion. When the son comes back, he shows his
father some dates he has gotten from the wealthy man and asks, “Why don’t you emigrate and
bring me something like this?” which makes Abdou feel “sharp pain in his heart” (27).

The subject of family in Abdou’s story is a noteworthy one. While he jumps from one
affair to the next, he still values his family that resides deep in his heart. It appears that the
women in Sodest Kilo symbolize a temporary haven for Abdou. They bear a physical
resemblance to his wife, offering him physical and emotional stability. Abdou needs them as much as they need him. The fact that he flatters women signifies their importance in his life. His actions demonstrate his need for his family, whose contact he has lost due to emigration. Could the life in Yemen be any better if Abdou had stayed? Now, he has missed many treasured moments—his son growing up, the building of his house, the birth of his grandson. Such beautiful moments drive fathers to intense happiness. Abdou’s separation from his family makes him alienated in his new society. Because Abdou left his family, the treasuring of his childhood memories appears to signal the sense of alienation he has been feeling. These situations suggest the destructive impact of immigration on literary characters. For instance, Chelala states: “In most immigration stories, the main character emigrates to a foreign land, works hard at success and finally reflects on his or her achievement. However, in Abdul-Wali’s work, emigrants risk losing their identities and severing ties with their motherland without becoming integrated into the new society.”

The absence of his family has left its mark on Abdou’s sense of belonging. Had his father, wife, and son surrounded him, Abdou could have kept his values or his identity. Because he is separated from his family, and because prostitutes linger near Sodest Kilo, Abdou has extramarital relationships. Robert Whitehurst explains that some married people engage in extramarital sex as a result of their alienation and opportunity factors. Yet, despite his sexual encounters, Abdou fails to be part of the new society and, thus, experiences another consequence of estrangement. Charles Hobart notes that alienation creates “a feeling that others don’t understand” and leads to “impaired ability to communicate with others.” Although Abdou is physically present among the people of Sodest Kilo, he is internally absent. Because Abdou has chosen not to confide in anyone, he appears as a ghost figure. It seems that the choice he has
made to keep his life ambiguous adds more depth to his failure of belonging. His reliance on masculinity rather than assimilation indicates his distorted vision of his life in Ethiopia. Therefore, Abdou presents a paradox. He never belongs, even if he appears as a man that women and children love. Abdou has alienated himself from society with his adherence to secrecy about his life. The author uses an interesting analogy to describe how Abdou has been a mysterious person in the eyes of people of Sodest Kilo. He is like a tomb that people are able to see, but are unable to fathom.

In addition, William Holmes notes, alienation includes a contradiction in social conditions (Holmes 218). One example of such contradictory behaviors is Abdou’s refusal to drink alcohol after one intimate night. Abdou terrifyingly murmurs, “I don’t drink. I don’t even want to see alcohol. May God protect us from its devils” (32). Abdou reasons that alcohol is forbidden in Islam and stubbornly says, “I won’t drink, even if I were to be chopped to pieces. Do you want me to against my religion?” (32). Abdou’s reaction is very difficult for his mistress to believe, as she wonders, “But…but you sleep with women. Isn’t that forbidden?” (32). She repeats the question more than once in order to fully understand the logic behind his reaction but her questions go unanswered as Abdou puts on his clothes and prepares to leave. Abdou does not provide a logical argument to explain his abstinence from alcohol. Both his mistress and he know that adultery is forbidden in Islam and rigorously condemned in many societies. However, Abdou seems to believe that extramarital sex is permissible for him while alcohol consumption is not.

Abdou’s negative behaviors can become problematic and lead to prejudice among outgroup members if the perceiver explains that the causes of the behavior are dispositional factors such as his poor character, absence of vision, or lack of effort. In contrast, if Abdou’s
behaviors are ascribed to situational factors—such as estrangement, troubled childhood, war, immigration, and others as discussed above—animosity and prejudice towards him are more likely to be reduced. Blaming Abdou for his wrongful behaviors is unfair because he has found himself in difficult circumstances, whether by birth, accident, or other factors beyond his control. In order to improve one’s attitude towards outgroup members, like Abdou, the role of dispositional factors needs to be downplayed when it comes to explaining that member’s negative behavior.

In conclusion, there are many ways in which *They Die Strangers* can be used to mitigate the damage caused by stereotyping Arabs. First, it offers many episodes that can elicit readers’ empathy, which can lead readers to have positive attitudes toward outgroup members. *They Die Strangers* can elicit empathetic responses in readers by using emotional contagion, direct association, and role taking. The elicitation of such responses can direct readers’ attention to build intervention through the provision of positive exemplars, prototypes, and information-processing scripts in order to dismantle the negative ones. Second, it can direct readers’ attention to faulty schemas and provides alternatives that promote better understanding of Arabs. Finally, it can train readers to replace harmful elements of stereotypes with favorable ones. The provision of constructive elements involves using situational over dispositional factors to explain people’s negative behaviors, understanding that the negative traits are not unique to certain groups, and avoiding the temptation to devalue outgroups in order to distinguish stereotyper’s own group from the other ones.
CONCLUSION

In American media, social groups have been portrayed both positively and negatively. This dissertation has focused on the representations of Arabs and discussed the damage caused by stereotyping Arabs. Despite the existence of positive images of Arabs, the negative ones remain prominent. The negative view of Arabs in the media have been ascribed to several factors. First, the media inherited the central negative view—as morally evil and bloodthirsty—from Europe when Arabs/Muslims were considered a threat in the Middle Ages. Then, after the decline of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century, what is known as American orientalism emerged, contributing to the vilification of Arabs. American orientalism has been intensified in conjunction with US policies in the Arab world. Consequently, Arabs—who live in an exceedingly diverse set of countries and adhere to a variety of religions—have been consistently represented in a negative light. Images of Arabs portrayed as evil, uneducated, submissive, sex-crazed, greedy, and more spread in myriad features. This project has dissected the representations of Arabs in two features from American media: “Stan of Arabia” and The Dictator. In these features, I have shown how a balanced portrayal is absent. The representations in these features fail to reflect the diversity of the Arab world and the richness of Arab cultures.

Scholars’ solutions to reduce negative images of Arabs in American media include: pleading to media to insert positive images, challenging the negative images by exposing them in academic and non-academic forms, and introducing the world to the ignored Arabs’ contributions to world civilization. However, these solutions are not enough as the negative images continue to predominate despite the emergence of a few positive ones. A number of
scholars have devoted their research to the representations of Arabs by discussing one element of the stereotype: negative images of Arabs. They have paid little attention to other important elements: (1) how the media attribute negative traits to particular stereotyped groups (distinctiveness), (2) how negative images are ascribed to internal causes (internal causality), and (3) how through such images, people favor their own groups (ingroup favoritism) and derogate others (outgroup derogation). The analysis of “Stan of Arabia” and The Dictator endeavored to discuss the harm caused by the above elements. Finally, while putting an end to the negative image of Arabs is difficult, this project offered a literary solution, incorporating research on cognitive science to reduce the damage caused by negative stereotypes.

Carefully crafted literature can foster positive changes in people’s attitudes through the integration of schemas and empathy. Because stereotypes are beliefs about social groups that are stored in individuals’ schemas—which involve exemplars, prototypes, and information-processing routines—it has been shown that in order to reduce the harm caused by stereotypes, a change in one’s schemas is required. To achieve desired changes in these schemas, empathy plays a vital role. Three empathy-arousing modes have been discussed: direct association, role taking, and emotional contagion. The elicitation of readers’ empathy through these modes serves to direct people’s attention to make alterations in their cognitive processes by forming more adequate schemas and weakening the faulty ones.

This dissertation has discussed two literary texts—Men in the Sun and They Die Strangers—to display how literature serves as a corrective apparatus that leads to improve people’s perceptions of others. First, these two texts provide readers with multiple exemplars and prototypes that include positive qualities of Arabs. Second, they train their readers in information processing by offering adequate information to which readers can attend, encode,
and recall in social encounters. The alterations in readers’ schemas require many repetitions in order for the schemas to weaken and new ones to be signaled automatically. While positive exemplars, prototypes, and information-processing activities function to reduce the damage caused by negative stereotypes, this dissertation has emphasized that altering schemas also involves correcting other harmful elements of stereotypes: internal attribution, ingroup/outgroup bias, and a faulty theory of distinctiveness. If all harmful elements of stereotypes are countered in literature, the damage that the stereotypes cause can be significantly alleviated.

Literature thus has the power to change people’s perceptions of others. The traumas explored in *Men in the Sun* and *They Die Strangers* establish a move from the media’s negative portrayals that dehumanize Arabs and offer a more complex and human representation of them through their own stories. The lenses through which Arabs have been observed ought to be replaced by new ones that will eventually reshape the perception of the encounter between the East and the West. The plight of Arabs described in the two narratives discussed here has the potential to construct a form of reality that blends concepts from literary study and methods from cognitive science. Although there are many Arabic narratives that offer positive representations, this dissertation calls for a fundamental need for investigating more Arabic works. American literary circles have approached only a limited number of Arabic works as a small part of examining postcolonial literature. Such works reduce diverse Arabic identities and concepts to one understanding. This understanding so much disregards the cultural diversity and concepts.

Providing a variety of Arabic works enriches pedagogy because individuals can be trained to correct faulty information that exists in one’s preexisting schemas. While there is a line of empirically supported evidence that shows literature’s corrective power, research lacks empirical investigation on changing people’s attitudes toward Arabs. This project has
endeavored to provide a systematic framework through which scholars can address the damage caused by stereotyping Arabs in hopes of changing people’s misperceptions of Arabs. This dissertation points to the fundamental need for critical reassessment of how the ideological currents of geopolitical conflicts in the Arab world serve to further promote negative attitudes toward Arabs. The function of this reassessment is to move beyond the traditional stereotypes and offer a complex understanding of the damage caused by contemporary depictions and/or perceptions of Arabs. When ignoring broader relationships between current events, the understanding of stereotypes lacks coherent theoretical procedures for proposing solutions that serve to ameliorate of the harm caused by stereotypes and prejudice.

Moreover, this dissertation has implications for educators. Although some Arabic literature is already used in the English classroom, this project proposes a broader utilization of Arabic texts in cultural studies, history, social studies, political science, anthropology and other areas that involve the understanding of Arabs. Moreover, the authors and works that have been brought to light in academia do not constitute the majority of the Arab world. The authors are mostly from Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria, and in a few cases, from Palestine and Sudan. The majority of Arabic fiction has gone virtually unknown in America. Even the works of celebrated Arab authors have been partially considered. This project, thus, calls attention to a crucial need for understanding more Arabic works through: translating more texts, organizing cultural events locally and globally to promote works from around the world, opening channels of communication between Arabic critics and their counterparts in America, and marketing Arabic literature in media. Arabic works that can be used to promote a better understanding are not rare and can be easily identified. Furthermore, although this dissertation has used Arabic literary texts to show the corrective role that literature plays, it also brings the attention to the possibility
of selecting literary works written by renowned non-Arab authors that include exemplars, prototypes, and information processing with positive qualities of Arabs in order to alleviate the harm caused by negative stereotypes of Arabs. ¹⁷³

Finally, the findings have some implications for the issue of gender equality in the Arab World. The roles that are believed to be performed by Arab women and men need a crucial reassessment. One interpretation of the findings shows the presence of Arab women who escape the traditional stereotypes playing important roles that do not fit the common stereotypes. The idea that literature serves as a vehicle for attitude change is not a new one. However, empirical investigation of using literature to build interventions designed to change misconceptions about Arab women is. Using literary studies and cognitive science, I hope this dissertation will trigger future investigations that aim at improving individuals’ perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors toward others.
Notes

1 See McLuhan 17; Straubhaar & LaRose 410-433 &; Steele & Aronson 797-811.

2 While the term media includes newspapers, magazines, movies, radio, and television, as well as Internet, to avoid confusion, I use the term in this project to refer to movies and TV shows only.


4 There is a wide range of research that has shown the crucial role of media in perpetuating negative stereotypes. I name just a few: the misrepresentation of women (Smith et al., 2013); the negative portrayal of Latinos on TV shows (Ramírez Berg 2002); the negative depictions of Asian American (Lee & Chan 2011); representations of African American (Dixon & Linz 2006); and homosexual representations (Gross 1991).

5 “Stan of Arabia” was aired in two episodes in the animated cartoon series American Dad. The title is a spin-off of the famous movie Lawrence of Arabia.

6 For a discussion of this point, see Clarke& Cambell 585-588; Jussim et al. 199-227; Swim 199-214

7 Shaheen’s documentation of the representations of Arabs in media shows clearly the tendency in Hollywood to portray wealthy Arabs (Sheikhs) in very negative ways. See, Shaheen, “Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People,” 180-183.

8 I can’t count the times at which I have been thought of as a wealthy man once the speaker knows I come from Saudi Arabia.
9 See Fiske, Bersoff, Borgida, & Deaux 1049.


11 The equation of Muslims with Arabs is problematic because it makes some non-Muslim Arabs fall into images or identities that incorporate Islam, and thus, become victims of misrepresentations.

12 I choose not to say, “who live in the Arab region” in defining Arabs because this would exclude an important part of the Arab world, Arab Diasporas.

13 The number of Arab atheists is increasing as evidenced by their writings on the Internet and Facebook. See Abu Khalil, "The Golden Era of Arab Atheism?"

14 The *Déscription de l'Egypte* (aka the *Description*) is a comprehensive French study of Egypt and its customs published in twenty-three volumes between 1809 and 1828 with hundreds of engravings and thousands of drawings. The study was part of Napoléon’s conquest of Egypt.

15 The Arab Revolt (1916–1918) was initiated to seek independence from the ruling Ottoman Turks and create a single unified Arab state. For an insightful discussion on this topic, see Murphy, David. *The Arab Revolt 1916-18: Lawrence Sets Arabia Ablaze*. Oxford: Osprey, 2008. Print.

16 In his study of the American view of Muslims/Arabs, Michael Suleiman asserts that many Americans hold negative views of Arabs. He writes, “These views may have changed somewhat in that certain attributes are at times more pronounced than at other times; however, the overall picture has been and continues to be distorted and negative” (33). See Suleiman, Michael.

17 Zunshine explains the term “Mind-reading” (also known as Theory of Mind) as “…our ability to explain people’s behavior in terms of their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires.” See Zunshine 3-16, for an account on this subject.

18 Martin Hoffman identifies only five empathy-arousing modes in his comprehensive study, *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice*. For a more detailed account of these modes, see 36-58.


20 See Davis et al. 713-26; Galinsky & Gillian 594-604.


23 In their study, Diekman, Mcdonald, and Gardner show how traditional romance narratives influence readers' own sexual scripts, for an insightful discussion on this point, see "Love Means Never Having To Be Careful." *Psychology of Women Quarterly Psychol of Women Q* 24.2 (2000): 179-88
As a whole, *Men in the Sun* “sealed Kanafani’s reputation as a talented fiction writer” and Kanafani was given more recognition when the Egyptian director Tawfiq Salih made the novella into a film (The *Dupes* 1972) Zalman, Amy. "Gender and the Palestinian Narrative of Return in Two Novels by Ghassan Kanafani," 19.


The most common misconception about Arabs is that they are often confused with the geographic region “Middle East,” which includes non-Arab countries such as Cyprus, Israel, Iran, and Turkey.

These are: Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritanian, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

Social scientists have been struggling to find a succinct, accurate definition of stereotypes for over half a century. Read these two definitions as an example: “…stereotype refers to those interpersonal beliefs and expectancies that are both widely shared and generally invalid” (Miller & Turnbull 233); “stereotypes are maladaptive forms of categories because their content does not correspond to what is going on in the environment" (Bargh & Chartrand 467).
Firmin Didot, a French printer, invented the term "stereotype" in 1798 to refer to a printing process used to create reproductions (Ashmore & Del Boca 1). Later Walter Lippmann (Public Opinion 1922) used the term to refer to the mental reproductions of reality.

Before Allport, the cognitive approach was not the dominant theoretical perspective in research on stereotypes. See Katz, Gordon Allport's The Nature of Prejudice 280-90, for more discussion on Allport’s contribution.

See Tajfel & Turner 33-47 for a thorough discussion on the subject of Social Identity Theory.

Brown emphasizes that negative stereotypes can serve an ideological function through justifying the status quo. For example, depicting a deprived minority as “lazy” serves to rationalize the social system. See Brown 72.

It is fair to say that while some stereotypes are positive, an enormous amount of research has been directed towards negative stereotypes due to the damage they may cause. For a long time, stereotypes have been labeled as inaccurate beliefs. However, according to Oakes, stereotypes are “psychologically valid and therefore carry a full potential for accuracy” (“Asking the Accuracy” 70). While the question of stereotypes’ inaccuracy is incontrovertible, it is interesting to remark that some stereotypes are accurate because they arise from a culture that offers many accurate generalizations. See Jussim 323-60 for an insightful analysis on the subject of stereotypes accuracy.

See Shaheen, Jack. Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People. 191

Shaheen believes that Arabs have been victims of stereotypes more than other groups. He writes, "from 1896 until today [2007], filmmakers have collectively indicted all Arabs as Public Enemy #1"(Reel Bad Arabs, 2).

39 One famous example is Hollywood’s campaign to help victims Hurricane Katrina in 2005 pleading with the public to make donations.

40 For more discussion on the subject of attribution theory and its implications, see Fiske, Susan T., and Shelley E. Taylor. *Social Cognition* .23-28


42 Ibid 280


44 For more account on ethnocentrism, see Schneider 230-231.


46 In Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, many people have been the victims of sectarian violence as a result of the increasingly rivalry between Sunnis and Shiites.


48 One example to show how stereotypes color people’s judgments of others is when some individuals who were asked to act as jurors in mock courtroom trails gave harsher judgments to perpetrators who are members of a group for which the crime is stereotypical rather than nonstereotypical. See Bodenhausen, Galen V., and Meryl Lichtenstein. "Social Stereotypes and


50 For more account on these three kinds of schemas, see Moskowitz 155-163.

51 Stereotype is sometimes regarded as a synonym of prototype (Lyons 96), which can cause confusion of both notions. Both concepts emphasize the presence of certain features that are shared, though not all, within members of a category. However, stereotypes are oversimplified behavioral patterns applied to groups that carry some truth. Prototypes, on the other hand, describe dynamic characteristics that are based on objective observations. Prototypes have a considerable amount of truth.

52 For more account on the subject of information processing, see Klatzky, Roberta L. Human Memory: Structures and Processes. San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1975.p 6-12

53 Beck, et al., 2004

54 Schema Therapy is an integrative approach to treatment adopted by therapists to help people change negative patterns (schemas) that they have lived with for a long time. This approach has shown remarkable results in attitude change. For an insightful discussion on this subject, see Young, Cognitive Therapy for Personality Disorders: A Schema-focused Approach 2002

55 Padesky, Christine A. "Schema Change Processes in Cognitive Therapy." 268

56 Homosexuals are among the most stereotyped groups in the world (Schneider 489).

57 See Drum, “Chart of the Day.”

58 See CAIR. "CAIR Asks Reviewers of FX's 'Tyrant' to Address Stereotypes of Muslim, Arab
Culture - CAIR."

59 See Schneider 381-401 for an account of the contact approach.

60 See Gerard & Miller, “School Desegregation: A Long-term Study”

61 See Stephan, "School Desegregation"

62 See "Arab Americans: Demographics."

63 On the subject of bias against people of Arab descent, see "Caught in Crossfire."


66 See Bracher, "How to Teach for Social Justice: Lessons from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Cognitive Science” 359-84.


68 See Galinsky & Moskowitz. 708-24.

69 Batson et al. "Empathy and Attitudes: Can Feeling for a Member of a Stigmatized Group Improve Feelings toward the Group?" 105-118.


71 In his important work, “How to Teach for Social Justice: Lessons from Uncle Tom's Cabin and Cognitive Science, and Social Change,” Mark Bracher explains that sympathizing with literary characters “does not, *in and of itself*, benefit real people” because “people who feel deep sympathy for characters can be indifferent and even cruel to real people who are suffering.”
(emphasis added, 364). However, Bracher explains that “for such a contribution to occur, literature must get its readers not merely to feel occasional sympathy for literary characters, but rather to experience a habitual sympathy for real stigmatized individuals and groups—an experience of sympathy that leads them, moreover, to take ameliorative social action” (365). For an insightful explanation on how reading literature can lead to effective actions that advance social justice, see “How to Teach for Social Justice.”


73 See Batson et al. "Empathy and Attitudes: Can Feeling for a Member of a Stigmatized Group Improve Feelings toward the Group?” (1997): 105-18; Batson et al. "Empathy, Attitudes, and Action: Can Feeling for a Member of a Stigmatized Group Motivate One to Help the Group?” (2002).


75 Stories around the world have a common structure, a structure that involves characters with problems. Jonathan Gottschall contrasts fiction to Noam Chomsky’s Universal Grammar Theory, which states that all languages have similar basic structure. Gottschall writes that there exists a “universal grammar in world fiction, a deep pattern of heroes confronting trouble and struggling to overcome” (55). In other words, whether you read Tayeb Salih’s Season of Migration to the North, Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s Crime and Punishment, Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre, or Victor
Hugo’s *Les Miserables*, you read stories in which lies the same structure: protagonists encountering trouble, as Gottschall claims.


77 Shaheen states that television executives allow these stereotypes to appear because they do not know much about Arabs. See *The TV Arab* 4.

78 Arab Americans have contributed greatly in many fields of American life. The Arab American Institute has profiled these contributions in their website. See Arab Americans: Making a Difference. *Arab American Institute Foundation*, 2002.

79 See Moore, John “The Evolution of Islamic Terrorism.”

80 Many media features have portrayed psychiatrists as evil characters who take advantage of the vulnerable. For example, in movies such as *The Color of Night*, *Final Analysis*, and *Hide and Seek*, instead of being shown as caretakers, psychiatrists are represented as troubled, sexually predatory, and even psychotic. See Palumbo, Dennis. "The Girl with the Evil Psychiatrist: Why Are Male Therapists Now Portrayed as Villains in Movies and on TV?" *Psychology Today*. Sussex Publishers, LLC, 4 Jan. 2012.

81 The frequency of Arabs in the media has increased in the past decade in the aftermath of 9/11. See Saleem & Anderson 84.

82 Even though Alsultany uses the terms *Muslim* and *Arabs* interchangeably throughout her analysis and even though in some parts of her discussion the author restricts her analysis to Muslims only, Arabs are included in her main arguments.

See Little, American Orientalism 17-42.


In 1973, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) prohibited all countries that had supported Israel in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War from buying the oil it sold. The embargo created energy crisis that led to one of the worst recessions in the history of the United States. See Myre, Greg. “The 1973 Arab Oil Embargo: The Old Rules No Longer Apply,” for more account on this crisis.

For a discussion on the accomplishments of Arab Americans though which they have distinguished themselves in science and medicine, academia and sports, the arts and politics, see "Famous Arab Americans - Arab American Institute." *Arab American Institute*. Arab American Institute, 2009.


Alsultany says, “People often ask me if I think Arabs should never be portrayed as terrorists. My response to this question is that the issue is not that Arabs should not be portrayed as terrorists. Rather, the issue is that they are rarely portrayed in other contexts.” See Evelyn. "Is Portraying Arabs as Terrorists Wrong?" *Is Portraying Arabs as Terrorists Wrong?* I agree with
Alsultany that the little weight given to positive representations cause observers to rely more on the negative ones, conveying a negative message as the only story about Arabs.

90 Even though Saudi Arabia bans alcohol and that the punishment for drinking alcohol is a public lashing, alcohol can be bought easily through smuggling. The ban comes from the prohibition of the consumption of any intoxicants in Islam. However, many Islamic countries do not ban alcohol (e.g., Egypt, Syria, Turkey, and mores) and many Muslims do consume alcohol.


93 In some regions of Saudi Arabia—Jeddah is an important example—the majority of women do not wear veils.


96 SUSRIS, "Understanding US-Saudi Relations"  
Al-Munajjed is one of the most influential Arab women. Al-Munajjed has a Ph.D. in sociology from George Washington University, and a postgraduate degree in sociology from New York University. She has written many books on social issues and spent over a decade working with the United Nations as an adviser on programs related to gender equality, women, and social development.

Recently and for the first time in Saudi modern history, women will be allowed not only to vote, but also to stand as candidates to run for public office in local elections. This decision comes as a result of the country’s pledge to reform women’s rights granting them opportunities for political participation. See Ilsley, Natalie. "Hundreds of Saudi Arabian Women Running in


111 The spelling is obtained from the movie subtitle.

112 Wii is a home video game console.

113 See Starkman, *The Dictator's Politics.*

114 See "American Morning-11-17-2004." CNN.com


116 See Starkman, *The Dictator's Politics*

117 Just in 1920s there were over 87 American films in which Arabs were portrayed negatively.


118 "The Dictator (2012) - Box Office Mojo."


121 In their study “Reading Narrative Fiction Reduces Arab-Muslim Prejudice and Offers a Safe Haven From Intergroup Anxiety”, Johnson, Jasper, Griffin, and Huffman assert that literature can elicit empathy and reduce prejudice and negative stereotypes of Muslims and Arabs. However, Johnson and his colleagues used a non-Arab narrative that has a non-Arab Muslim
protagonist. In the study, participants read either a full narrative or a shortened narrative about a strong-willed Muslim woman. The conditions had the same counterstereotypical exemplars, but the full narrative included more descriptive language to test whether fiction reduces prejudice beyond simple exposure to counterstereotypical exemplars. Participants in the full narrative condition read an eight-page excerpt from Shaila Abdullah’s *Saffron Dreams* while those in the shortened condition read a one-page summary of the same excerpt. The excerpt tells story of the protagonist, an educated Muslim woman, who is assailed in a New York City subway station. She is also pregnant and shows courage when facing her assailants’ ethnic and religious slurs. After reading, participants rated how much empathy they felt toward Arab-Muslims as a group and completed a measure of explicit attitudes toward them as a group. Results demonstrate that literature reduces prejudice and that its effect generates empathetic responses toward Arab-Muslims. The findings, hence, pertain more to improving perceptions of Muslims rather than those of Arabs. See Johnson et al., 578-598 for insightful analysis and descriptive statistics for the study.


125 The word *Abu* (meaning father in Arabic) when followed by another word forms a complete name.
Mar and Oatley note that literature has been given little importance due the conviction that its role is simply and only to entertain (172). Many scholars have shown that literature’s function goes beyond entertainment. See Booth 277-90; Rorty 132-33; Hunt 32, 40; and Roche 26.

See Miall &Kuiken 221-241.

In a recent study, Bal and Veltkamp show that participants who read excerpts from literary texts scored higher on an empathy scale than those who had read a nonfiction texts. See Bal, Matthijs, and Martijn Veltkamp. “How Does Fiction Reading Influence Empathy? An Experimental Investigation on the Role of Emotional Transportation.” PLoS One 8.1(2013): 1-12

See Omdahl 24

In her beautifully crafted masterpiece, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee shows through the astute words of Atticus Finch the importance of being in the position of others in order to understand them. The author states: “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view . . . until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.” Atticus’s moral advice shows how viewing a situation from another's place is crucial to understand people.


Qtd. in Blagg, Deborah. "A Closer Look at Social Perspective Taking

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire (1918-1920), under which Palestine was a territory, a new era began as Palestine entered into the British Mandate period, which continued for the next thirty years (Bickerton & Klausner 43-44). Palestinian Arabs and Zionist Jews fought for the control of Palestine under the British authority. It was not until 1947 that the British decided to leave the matter of Palestine’s future in the hands of the United Nations (Morris 180). As a result, the United Nations General Assembly voted to divide western Palestine into two states—
one for the Jews and the other for the Palestinian Arabs (Friedman14). The Zionists, then led by David Ben-Gurion, accepted this partition plan, but the Palestinian Arabs and the surrounding Arab states rejected the partition proposal, stating that Palestine was all theirs. On May 14, 1948, the Jewish community declared its independence as the state of Israel, and the United States and Russia immediately recognized the declaration, resulting in the Arab-Israeli War of 1948. After the war, the Arab world continued its massive political warfare against Israel by refusing to recognize Israel’s existence. Consequently, a comprehensive Arab economic boycott was imposed, including the closure by Egypt of the Suez Canal (July 26, 1956), which started the second Arab-Israeli war of 1956. Tensions mounted between Israel and Arabs in 1967 after the Egyptian president, Abdul Nasser, closed the straits of Aqaba to Israeli shipping and made military agreements with Syria and Jordan, resulting in what it is known as “The Six-Day War.” The war ended with the Israeli forces seizing Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula, Syria’s Golan Heights, and Jordan’s West Bank. In 1973, the Egyptian Army launched a sudden attack (the fourth war) upon the Israeli forces on the east bank of the Suez Canal; at the same moment, and by agreement, the Syrian army attacked the Israelis from the Golan Heights (Hourani 413-418). The conflicts between Israel and Arabs continued to escalate until December 9, 1987, when the first riots of the Palestinian Intifada, or “shaking off” in Arabic, erupted as thousands of Palestinians went to the streets in protest, burning tires and throwing rocks at Israeli police and troops. The Intifada ended when both sides revised their policies. After the Intifada, Israel agreed to recognize the Palestinian Liberation Organization (P.L.O.) and to evacuate most of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The result of the Intifada was the emergence of a Palestinian state (Morris 561-610).
Although the author does not specify an exact date, it is most likely that *Men in the Sun* takes place during the 1950s. But because each male protagonist comes from a different generation, it is challenging to specify a time period from which to discuss the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.


See Batson et al. 1997

Omdahl states that no disagreement exists in terms of the ability of role taking to elicit empathy (35).


Dodge’s (1986) model proposed that when children are in a social situation they are faced with an array of cues from which they have to choose and then process by engaging in specific cognitive steps before enacting a behavioral response. Crick and Dodge (1994) reformulated this initial model and the revised model has become the dominant information-processing model that brought wide attention among researchers.

The model is formulated as a global framework that represents cognitive operations underlying child behavior. However, the model can be applied with others.

Ustaz means “teacher” in Arabic.

The idea that Arab rulers have contributed to the Palestinian problem is widespread, not only in Palestinian narratives but also in politics. The former Palestinian leader, Yassir Arafat, once said that what had caused the Palestinian problem was that “Our Arab brothers betrayed us” For more discussion on this subject see Rubinstein, "The Arab Betrayal, Then as Now."

Ingroup-Outgroup Bias is found in cultures around the world (Aberson, Healy, & Romero, 2000; Brewer, 1979).

See Harlow, After Lives: Legacies of Revolutionary Writing, 133.

Before Abdul-Wali, particularly prior to the 1960s, Yemeni literature comprised primarily histories, religious scholarship, and narratives that idealized elites from the past. Works that are concerned with ordinary people were absent. Al-Wali, Muḥammad Abdul, Abu Bakr Aḥmad. Baqadir, and Deborah S. Akers. They Die Strangers. Austin: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, the U of Texas at Austin, 2001. Print. (Introduction 1)

The author’s style is distinctive. Silvia Chelala points out that the stories of Abdul-Wali captivate readers with “their simplicity of style, the universality of the experiences they relate,

151 Sodest Kilo (Kilo Six) is a busy quarter in Ethiopia’s capital, Addis Ababa.


153 An interesting aspect of the author’s approach to show the poor’s plight is that he does not subscribe to the pattern established by other Arab writers who have presented their unfortunate protagonists leaving their poor country to live in far more civilized places. In most immigration stories—for instance, Tayeb Salih’s Season of Migration to the North or Bahaa Taher’s Love in Exile—the main character emigrates to a Western land, studies, or works hard so he can achieve success either financially or spiritually. The authors of these familiar stories offer an intense and vivid description of encounters with the West—encounters that serve to create a better understanding of both Arabic and Western cultural identities. Unlike these works, They Die Strangers is a unique portrayal in which the author presents an East-East encounter.


Davis and his colleagues provide empirical evidence to show that the effect of active role taking creates “a merging of self and other”(714). In two experiments, they displayed how role taking leads observers to create cognitive representations of others that substantially overlap with the observers' own self-representations. See Davis, Mark H. Laura Conklin, Amy Smith, and Carol Luce Charles W. "Effect of Perspective Taking on the Cognitive Representation of Persons: A Merging of Self and Other." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 70.4 (1996): 713-26.


The perception that Arabs are wealthy is evident in numerous media depictions. See Shaheen 1984,74; 2001,19 ; El-Farra 7.


166 Chelala, "The Stories of the Forgotten.”


170 The most read Arabic work in academia is the classic post-colonial Sudanese novel *Season of Migration* by Tayeb Salih. Another major work is Abdelrahman Munif’s *Cities of Salt*, which is regarded as one of the greatest modern Arabic novels.

171 For example, only a few novels have been translated into English even if the Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz, who won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1988, is considered to be the greatest Arabic writer of the twentieth century. Yet, a little weight is given to his novel career.

172 The limited number of Arabic literary works is ascribed to the lack of translations. Translators usually take the views of some professors of Arabic literature and Arab critics on which novels and authors to consider translating. They read brief summaries of these novels and choose the
ones that appeal to them. Such limited choices result in having a very small number of works that eventually get the satisfaction of publishers.

173 One example is of such texts is Paulo Coelho’s most famous and translated work *The Alchemist* which Arabs and Arabic cultures are positively represented.
Works Cited


--- “How to Teach for Social Justice: Lessons from Uncle Tom's Cabin and

--- Radical Pedagogy: Identity, Generativity, and Social Transformation. Houndmills,

--- “Schema Criticism: Literature, Cognitive Science, and Social Change.” College Literature

--- Social Symptoms of Identity Needs: Why We Have Failed to Solve Our Social Problems, and

Brewer, Marilynn B. “The Psychology of Prejudice: Ingroup Love and Outgroup Hate?” Journal


CAIR. “CAIR Asks Reviewers of FX's ‘Tyrant’ to Address Stereotypes of Muslim, Arab
Culture - CAIR.” CAIR Asks Reviewers of FX's 'Tyrant' to Address Stereotypes of
Muslim, Arab Culture - CAIR. CAIR, 20 June 2014. Web.


Chelala, Silvia. “The Stories of the Forgotten | Al Jadid Magazine.” The Stories of the

Clarke, Robert B., and Donald T. Campbell. “A Demonstration of Bias in Estimates of Negro

Clore, Gerald L., and Katharine M. Jeffery. “Emotional Role Playing, Attitude Change, and
Attraction toward a Disabled Person.” Journal of Personality and Social Psychology

Cloud, Dana L. “To Veil the Threat of Terror: Afghan Women and the clash of
Civilizations in the Imagery of the U.S. War on Terrorism.” Quarterly Journal of

Crick, Nicki R., and Gary W. Ladd. “Children's Perceptions of Their Peer Experiences:
Attributions, Loneliness, Social Anxiety, and Social Avoidance.” Developmental


Frayser, Suzanne G. Varieties of Sexual Experience: An Anthropological Perspective on


Hamilton, David. and T.K. Troiler. “Stereotypes and Stereotyping: An Overview of the


*The Last Command.* Dir. Frank Lloyd. 1955.


*Lawrence of Arabia.* Dir. David Lean. 1962.


Maurer, Todd J., Debora R. D. Mitchell, and Francisco G. Barbeite. “Predictors of Attitudes toward a 360-degree Feedback System and Involvement in Post-feedback Management


176


*The Sheik*. Dir. George Melford. 1921.

Sia, Tiffiny L., Charles G. Lord, Kenneth A. Blessum, Christopher D. Ratcliff, and Mark R. Lepper. “Is a Rose Always a Rose? The Role of Social Category Exemplar Change in


*Tarzan of the Apes*. Dir. Scott Sidney. 1918.


Appendix A
List of Arabic Narratives

Following is a list of Arabic literary narratives that I find useful in promoting a better understanding of Arabs.

- *Fragments of Memory* (2004) by Hanna Mina
- *I Saw the Date-Palms* (1991) by Radwa Ashour
- *The Journey of Little Gandhi* (2009) by Elias Khoury
- *No One Sleeps in Alexandria* (2007) by Ibrahim Abdel Maguid
- *Prairie of Fever* (1998) by Ibrahim Nasrallah
- *Season of Migration to the North* (2009) by Tayeb Salih
- *Ya Khabiir* (2002) by Mohammed Abdul-Wali