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Kamans, Elanor; Gordijn, Ernestine H.; Oldenhuis, Hilbrand; Otten, Sabine

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Short research note

What I think you see is what you get: Influence of prejudice on assimilation to negative meta-stereotypes among Dutch Moroccan teenagers

ELANOR KAMANS*, ERNESTINE H. GORDIJN,
HILBRAND OLDENHUIS AND SABINE OTTEN
University of Groningen, The Netherlands

Abstract

This research examined how Dutch Moroccan teenagers in the Netherlands deal with the negative stereotype that they believe the Dutch have about their group. We hypothesize that Moroccans act in line with this negative image when they are prejudiced against the Dutch and feel personally meta-stereotyped. A survey study among 88 Dutch Moroccan teenagers revealed that Moroccan teenagers who felt negative about the Dutch and thought that they were personally negatively stereotyped, expressed attitudes in line with this negative “meta-stereotype.” That is, they act in line with the outgroup’s negative image by legitimizing criminality, aggression, loitering teenagers, and Muslim extremism. These findings suggest that being confronted with a negative stereotype about one’s group might sometimes lead to a reaction that is both harmful for the stereotyped group as well as society in general. Copyright © 2009 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

“Sometimes I think, you are right. You have to destroy this entire country. Dutch Moroccans are being discriminated into pieces here in Holland.” Fouad Mourigh (Effting, 2005).

Like many Muslims in today’s western world, Dutch Moroccan teenagers¹ in the Netherlands are confronted with negative stereotypes about their group. And like Fouad Mourigh, many Moroccan teenagers feel that they are not accepted in Dutch society. According to Hermans (2006), these teenagers feel that the Dutch majority discriminates against them. This point is illustrated by stories of security people in shops closely watching Moroccan teenagers, and elderly women in buses holding their bags firmly when Moroccans pass by. Since 9/11 and the murder of Theo van Gogh, a Dutch filmmaker and columnist with anti-Islamic ideas who was murdered by a Muslim extremist, the perception of Moroccans being Muslim terrorists has become even more prevalent. In conclusion, the Dutch majority does not think too positively about Moroccans (Gordijn, Koomen, & Stapel, 2001), and Moroccans in the Netherlands are fully aware of this (Hermans, 2006; Starkenburg, 2005).

How does it influence Moroccan teenagers when they think that the Dutch majority sees them as criminal, aggressive, or terrorist? Or more generally, what are the consequences for one’s behavior when one experiences such negativity regarding one’s group? Fouad Mourigh says, “Sometimes I think you have to destroy this entire country.” This is of course an extreme point of view, and only a few people might be tempted to really go this far. However, when being confronted so often with the negative stereotypes of the Dutch majority about one’s group, it might be that Moroccan teenagers become inclined to reciprocate this negativity. We argue that one way to do this is to legitimize behavior that is in line with this negative image, and that this is a preferred strategy for those who are not so positive about the Dutch.

*Correspondence to: Elanor Kamans, Department of Social and Organizational Psychology, University of Groningen, Grote Kruisstraat 2/1, 9712 TS Groningen, The Netherlands. E-mail: e.kamans@rug.nl

¹In the remaining text, we use the word Moroccans when we refer to Dutch Moroccans.

META-STEREOTYPES AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON BEHAVIOR

In current Dutch society, people of Moroccan descent are confronted with a clearly negative stereotype about their group. Moroccans are seen as criminal, unadjusted, lazy, sexist, and aggressive (Gordijn et al., 2001). Of course, stereotyping is only one side of the story. The indigenous Dutch and Moroccans do not live separately from each other, and Moroccans know that they are being stereotyped. Consequently, Moroccans are likely to have *expectations* about how the indigenous Dutch see them. Vorauer, Main, and O'Connell (1998) introduced the term *meta-stereotype* to refer to a person's belief regarding the stereotype that outgroup members hold about his or her own group. Thus, when a Moroccan teenager thinks, "Dutch people think we Moroccans are criminals," this is a meta-stereotype.

When activated, meta-stereotypes can influence behavior in two ways; people can assimilate to or contrast away from a specific meta-stereotype. Because meta-stereotypes always include the cognition "the other group thinks this about my group," an intergroup context is necessarily salient when meta-stereotypes are activated. When an intergroup context is salient people are more likely to distance themselves from outgroups (Spears, Gordijn, Dijksterhuis, & Stapel, 2004; Ruys, Spears, Gordijn, & De Vries, 2007). For example, Spears et al. (2004) showed that people have an automatic tendency to distinguish the ingroup from the outgroup on stereotypical dimensions, when an intergroup context is salient. In their research this resulted in contrast behavior when the stereotype of an outgroup is activated. They showed for example that psychology students became less busy (took more time to complete a questionnaire and waited longer in a waiting room) when the stereotype of businessmen (busy) was activated together with an intergroup comparison.

When negative meta-stereotypes are activated, contrasting away from this meta-stereotype does not result in a greater distance, but assimilation does. This is because meta-stereotypes do not only give information about how an outgroup perceives the ingroup (e.g., according to the Dutch Moroccans are criminal), but also about how the outgroup perceives themselves on this dimension (Dutch people are less criminal than Moroccans). Therefore, behaving in line with the assumed negative expectancies the outgroup has about one's ingroup ensures one that s/he will not be like "them," and as such it is a way to maintain the distance between ingroup and outgroup. Disconfirming the expectations on the other hand would decrease this distance.

Findings by Oldenhuis, Gordijn, and Otten (2008) are in line with this reasoning. They manipulated the activation of a meta-stereotype by letting participants anticipate an interaction with an outgroup member. They showed that East German participants showed more lazy behavior (completed less pages of a tiring task) when the meta-stereotype that West Germans would perceive East Germans as lazy was activated.

This process resembles somewhat the process of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Typically, research on self-fulfilling prophecies focuses on how expectancies of a perceiver (e.g., a teacher) change how this perceiver acts toward a target (e.g., a student), which then changes the target's behavior and/or self-concept (Hamilton, Sherman, & Ruvalo, 1990; Smith, Jussim, & Eccles, 1999). For example, there is evidence that shows that expectancies of parents influence the behavior of their children. The presumed process is that these children are aware of these expectancies and then act upon them (Eccles, 2007). These processes have been studied in research on interpersonal relations. We believe that such processes also matter in intergroup relations. When talking about expectancies people have about how they are seen by an outgroup, we refer to the concept of meta-stereotypes (Vorauer et al., 1998). We believe that the activation of such meta-stereotypes can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy.

However, whether behavioral assimilation to a negative meta-stereotype occurs depends on the motivation people have to distinguish themselves from a disliked outgroup. We argue that level of prejudice determines how motivated people are in this respect (Spears et al., 2004). Klein and Azzi (2001) also reason that although people often disconfirm negative meta-stereotypical traits, people might act differently (confirm a negative meta-stereotype) when there is a conflict between ingroup and outgroup. In fact, these negative evaluations of the ingroup by a devalued outgroup can sometimes serve as positive input for social identity (Haslam, Oakes, McCarty, Turner, Reynolds, & Eggins, 1996; Turner, 1991).

We think that especially people who are prejudiced against the outgroup are likely to experience intergroup conflict and are therefore motivated to distinguish themselves from the outgroup. When a meta-stereotype is activated people can distinguish themselves from the outgroup along meta-stereotypical dimensions, resulting in assimilation to the negative expectations. In line with this idea, Gordijn, Oldenhuis, and Otten (2008) found that only high prejudiced people expressed attitudes in line with an activated negative meta-stereotype.

THE CURRENT STUDY

Muslim and Moroccan teenagers in the Netherlands are depicted very negatively in the media, and therefore, we can assume that Moroccan teenagers have a quite clear and consistent idea about how Dutch people think of their group. Furthermore, we know from previous research that people in powerless positions are particularly inclined to engage in meta-stereotyping (Lammers, Gordijn, & Otten, 2008). Moroccan youth in the Netherlands occupies a relatively powerless position and Moroccan teenagers are therefore very likely to meta-stereotype. For this reason, we think that variance among Moroccan teenagers in the activation and content of their meta-stereotypes will be small.

However, Moroccan teenagers can differ when it comes to the *extent* that they think that people see *them personally* in line with the meta-stereotype. For example, someone might believe that the Dutch see Moroccan teenagers in general as criminals, but does not think that he himself is perceived that way. Vorauer et al. (1998) distinguished such *personalized meta-stereotypes* from meta-stereotypes in general. A personalized meta-stereotype refers to the stereotypic expectations people think an outgroup member has about them personally, because they are a member of a certain group. A Moroccan adolescent could think, for example: “When I get on the bus, Dutch people hold their bag tight, because I am a Moroccan and they therefore think I am a criminal.”

In the current study, we investigated the consequences of such personalized meta-stereotypes. We hypothesized that the combination of personalized meta-stereotyping and being prejudiced against the indigenous Dutch leads Moroccan teenagers to act in line with these negative meta-stereotypes. To test our ideas, we conducted a survey study at two different high schools in the Netherlands. As the behaviors that are related to the meta-stereotype of Moroccans are hard to measure directly in a survey study, we decided to measure to what extent Moroccan teenagers legitimize meta-stereotypical behavior, such as, stating that criminal behavior or Muslim terrorism is ok and normal. We see this legitimization as a form of behavioral assimilation. Thus, we expect that Moroccan teenagers only legitimize meta-stereotypical behavior when they are both prejudiced and believe that they are personally meta-stereotyped.

METHOD

Participants

Eighty-eight Dutch Moroccan teenagers participated in the study.² Students were aged between 13 and 17 ($M = 15.17$, $SD = .89$). Among them, 41 were female and 35 were male. Five participants did not answer the question related to gender. All participants indicated that they were of Moroccan descent. Further, 77 participants indicated that they were Muslim, while 4 participants did not answer this question.

Pilot

To determine the meta-stereotype of Moroccans, we interviewed 13 Moroccan teenagers, males and females varying in age between 14 and 18 years old. We asked these teenagers how they thought Moroccans are perceived by Dutch people. From these explorative interviews, we derived the following Moroccan meta-stereotypical characteristics: “criminal,” “aggressive,” “extreme Muslim,” and “loitering teenager.”³ All these characteristics were mentioned spontaneously by at least 30% of the participants, suggesting that they are shared by the population (Gilbert & Hixon, 1991).

²Data of seven participants were not included in the analysis because of strong doubts about the seriousness of answers. These doubts were raised when participants circled the same number over and over, completely unaffected by the fact that some items were positively framed and others negatively.

³Loitering teenager is a translation of the Dutch word “hangjongere.” The Dutch term “hangjongere,” is often used in relation to problems (e.g., criminality, aggressiveness, intimidation of residents, vandalism) with Moroccan teenagers in neighborhoods with low SES.

Procedure and Predictor Variables

The study was embedded in a survey on topics related to ethnic background.⁴ Only those parts of the survey relevant for the hypotheses are discussed. Due to practical reasons, 31 participants received a digital version, while 50 participants received a paper and pencil version. The versions did not differ in any other respect. The questionnaire consisted of several parts. In the first part, we asked demographic questions concerning age, gender, descent, religion, nationality of participant and his/her parents, and land of origin of participant and his/her parents.

In the following parts, we measured the constructs used in our model. *Prejudice toward the Dutch* was conceptualized as a negative evaluation of the Dutch (Brewer, 2003) and was measured on a seven-point scale (1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree) with the item "I feel negative toward the Dutch." This item was embedded in a sub-questionnaire about feelings toward different groups in Dutch society.

Participants read the following instruction to measure to what extent people felt *personally meta-stereotyped*. "When people meet for the first time, they often have expectations about each other. Imagine that you are standing at the bus stop. There is a Dutch person standing next to you. What expectation do you think this Dutch person has about you, before he/she gets to know you as a person?" (Vorauer et al., 1998). After that, participants responded to the item: "I think that the Dutch person thinks I am. . .," after which a list with 27 items was presented. Among these items, 8 were meta-stereotypical and 19 served as filler items. Participants could indicate to what extent they agreed (1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree) with these statements. The meta-stereotypical scales used in the analysis consisted of the following items. Two items (criminal and stealing) were used to measure the extent to which participants thought they were seen as criminal (Pearson's $r = .66$, $p < .001$). Three items (loitering, calling names, and bullying) (Chronbach's $\alpha = .82$) measured to what extent people thought they were seen as a loitering teenager. Two items (aggressive and tough) measured the meta-stereotypical characteristic aggressive (Pearson's $r = .27$, $p < .02$). Extreme Muslim was measured with the item "extreme Muslim."

We used the same list of 27 characteristics to check whether the meta-stereotypical characteristics that were derived from the pilot study were indeed meta-stereotypical. To examine how Moroccan teenagers think the Dutch see them (*meta-stereotype*) we asked participants the following question: "according to the Dutch, Moroccans are. . .," which was followed by the same 27 items, including the 8 meta-stereotypical items. To examine how Moroccans perceived their own group (*auto-stereotype*), we asked the following question: "most Moroccans are. . .," after which we presented the same 27 items again. The auto-stereotype was measured to test whether it differs from the meta-stereotype. We scaled the items in the same way as we scaled the personalized meta-stereotypical items.

Dependent Variables

To examine whether Moroccan teenagers *assimilated to the negative meta-stereotype* we asked them to what extent they legitimized behavior that was in line with the negative meta-stereotypes. To measure this, we presented propositions related to the behaviors in question (see Appendix). Participants indicated to what extent they agreed with the propositions on a seven-point scale (1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree).

In order to measure legitimization of criminal behavior we presented four propositions (e.g., I think that everybody steals once in a while, Chronbach's $\alpha = .57$).⁵ Legitimization of teenage loitering behavior is measured with three items (e.g., it is fun to call people names, Chronbach's $\alpha = .74$). Six items were used to measure legitimization of aggressive behavior (e.g., when somebody seeks a fight with me, he can have it, Chronbach's $\alpha = .71$). Legitimization of Muslim terrorism was measured with the following item.⁶ "People who conduct aggressive behavior in name of the Jihad understand the Koran well."

⁴The survey was distributed in the classroom. Students with other than Moroccan ethnical background filled in a questionnaire as well. This to prevent Moroccan teenagers from feeling discriminated.

⁵Analyses of separate items revealed effects in the same direction. Therefore, we decided to scale the items in spite of their low reliability.

⁶The original scale was not reliable enough. We used the most extreme item in the analysis. This item deviated strongly from the other less extreme items.

Table 1. Correlations between the different meta-stereotype scales

	Criminal	Loitering teenager	Aggressive	Extreme Muslim
Criminal	—			
Loitering teenager	.79**	—		
Aggressive	.56**	.64**	—	
Extreme Muslim	.07	.29*	.34**	—

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$.

RESULTS

Meta-Stereotypes: Descriptive Analyses

Because we hypothesize that under some conditions people assimilate to a negative meta-stereotype it is important to know that our participants thought that the selected characteristics were indeed meta-stereotypical. Therefore, we examined whether Moroccan teenagers expected the Dutch majority to characterize them as “criminal,” “loitering teenager,” “aggressive,” and “extreme Muslim.” To this end, we first used simple t -tests to test whether ratings on the meta-stereotype questions significantly differed from the midpoint from the scale, indicating that participants indeed perceived the characteristics as meta-stereotypical. Second, we wanted to be sure that the traits criminal, loitering teenager, aggressive, and extreme Muslim were not part of the auto-stereotype of Moroccan teenagers. If this was the case, assimilation to a meta-stereotype would merely be behaving in a way that is prototypical for Moroccans. We used simple t -test to test whether the meta-stereotype differed from the auto-stereotype.

The mean for the meta-stereotype criminal was 5.30, $SD = 1.90$. A t -test revealed that it differed significantly from the midpoint of the scale (4), $t(76) = 5.74$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, paired t -tests indicated that the means for this meta-stereotype and the auto-stereotype differed significantly, $t(73) = 6.95$, $p < .001$, $M_{\text{auto-stereotype}} = 2.94$, $SD = 1.85$. The mean for the meta-stereotype loitering teenager was 5.00, $SD = 1.73$. A t -test indicated that it differed significantly from the midpoint of the scale, $t(75) = 5.20$, $p < .001$. This characteristic was also more meta-stereotypical than auto-stereotypical, $t(73) = 6.87$, $p < .001$, $M_{\text{auto-stereotype}} = 3.24$, $SD = 1.66$. The mean for the meta-stereotype aggressive was 5.18, $SD = 1.80$. A t -test indicated that it differed significantly from the midpoint of the scale, $t(75) = 6.84$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, paired t -tests indicated that the means for this meta-stereotype and the auto-stereotype differed significantly, $t(73) = 5.12$, $p < .001$, $M_{\text{auto-stereotype}} = 4.28$, $SD = 1.77$. The mean for the meta-stereotype “extreme Muslim” was 4.88, $SD = 2.01$. A t -test indicated that it differed significantly from the midpoint of the scale, $t(75) = 3.55$, $p < .001$, and from the ratings on the auto-stereotype questions $t(73) = 3.45$, $p < .001$, $M_{\text{auto-stereotype}} = 3.76$, $SD = 2.27$. On average the four traits were indeed meta-stereotypical. The correlations between the different personalized meta-stereotype scales are reported in Table 1.

Since we hypothesized that especially participants who are highly prejudiced and feel personally meta-stereotyped assimilate on meta-stereotypical dimensions, it is important to know that these participants also perceive the selected traits as meta-stereotypical and not as auto-stereotypical; that is, for this group of people there should be a difference between meta-stereotype and auto-stereotype as well. To test this, we ran four regression analyses with prejudice (standardized), one of the four personalized meta-stereotypical characteristics (all standardized), and their interaction term as predictors of the respective difference score (meta-stereotype–auto-stereotype). The interactions between prejudice and one of the four personal meta-stereotypes did not predict any changes in difference scores between meta-stereotypes and auto-stereotypes; t -values for criminal, loitering teenager, aggressive, and extreme Muslim, respectively, $t < 1$, $t < 1.4$, $t < 1$, and $t < 1$. Therefore, we conclude that highly prejudiced people that feel personally meta-stereotyped perceive these traits just as meta-stereotypical as the rest of our sample.

⁷When participants failed to complete an item or circled more than one number, this was reported as a missing value. These missing values occurred randomly. Due to these missing values (excluded listwise) the degrees of freedom sometimes differ.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for and correlations between predictor variables

	Mean	SD	<i>r</i> with prejudice
Prejudice	3.34	1.92	—
PM criminal	3.18	2.23	.16, ns
PM loitering teenager	3.18	1.98	.18, ns
PM aggressive	3.89	1.82	.17, ns
PM extreme Muslim	4.42	2.28	.19, ns

Note: PM is an abbreviation of personal meta-stereotype.

Behavioral Expressions With Respect to Negative Meta-Stereotypes

We hypothesized that Moroccan teenagers would assimilate to a negative meta-stereotype when they were both prejudiced and did personally meta-stereotype. This would mean that these Moroccan teenagers would legitimize the meta-stereotypical behavior in question (e.g., legitimizing criminal behavior when one thinks one is perceived as criminal) to a greater extent. To test this, we ran four regression analyses with prejudice (standardized), one of the four personalized meta-stereotypical characteristics (all standardized), and their interaction term as predictors of legitimization of the four meta-stereotypical behaviors. The descriptive statistics of the predictor variables are reported in Table 2.

The regression analysis with respect to legitimization of *criminal behavior* revealed, as expected, an interaction effect between prejudice and expecting to be seen as a criminal, $R^2 = .18$, $b = .59$, $t(65) = 3.31$, $p = .005$. Simple slope analyses revealed that when people were prejudiced (+1 SD), the personalized meta-stereotype of being seen as a criminal was a good predictor of legitimization of criminal behavior, $b = .76$, $t(65) = 3.05$, $p = .003$. This was not the case when people were not prejudiced (−1 SD), $b = -.42$, $t(65) = -1.62$, *ns* (see Figure 1).

With respect to legitimization of *loitering teenager behavior*, regression analyses again revealed an interaction effect $R^2 = .17$, $b = .46$, $t(66) = 2.62$, $p = .01$. Simple slope analyses showed that the personalized meta-stereotype of being seen as a loitering teenager was a good predictor of a legitimization of loitering teenager behavior, when people were prejudiced (+1 SD), $b = .68$, $t(66) = 2.60$, $p = .01$, but not when they were not prejudiced (−1 SD), $b = -.24$, $t(66) = -.97$, *ns* (see Figure 2).

The regression analysis with respect to legitimization of *aggressive behavior* revealed a marginally significant main effect of personalized meta-stereotype, $R^2 = .14$, $b = .31$, $t(67) = 1.81$, $p < .08$. This suggested that the personalized meta-stereotype aggressive tended to be a predictor of legitimization of aggressive behavior. However, as expected there was also an interaction effect between the two predictor variables, $b = .29$, $t(67) = 1.74$, $p < .09$, which was marginally significant. In line with predictions, simple slope analyses showed that when people were prejudiced (+1 SD) the personalized meta-stereotype of being seen as aggressive was a good predictor of legitimization of aggressive behavior, $b = .60$, $t(67) = 2.67$, $p < .009$. This was not the case when people were not prejudiced (−1 SD), $b = .01$, $t(67) = .07$, *ns* (see Figure 3).

Finally, the regression analysis with respect to legitimization of terrorism showed that personalized meta-stereotype and prejudice were both significant predictors, $R^2 = .26$, respectively, $b = .68$, $t(67) = 2.15$, $p < .004$, and $b = .49$

Figure 1. Legitimization of criminal behavior as a function of feeling personally meta-stereotyped as criminal and prejudice

Figure 2. Legitimization of loitering teenage behavior as a function of feeling personally meta-stereotyped as loitering teenager and prejudice

Figure 3. Legitimization of aggressive behavior as a function of feeling personally meta-stereotyped as aggressive and prejudice

Figure 4. Legitimization of terrorism as a function of feeling personally meta-stereotyped as Muslim extremist and prejudice

$t(67) = .298$, $p = .04$. However, as expected, these main effects were qualified by their interaction term, $b = .60$, $t(67) = 2.67$, $p < .009$. Simple slope analysis showed that the personalized meta-stereotype of being seen as a Muslim terrorist was a good predictor $b = 1.29$, $t(67) = 3.75$, $p < .001$, when people were prejudiced (+1 SD), but not when they were not prejudiced (-1 SD), $b = .09$, $t(67) = .30$, ns (see Figure 4).

DISCUSSION

This research was conducted to reveal some of the possible consequences of the negative image that the Moroccan youth in the Netherlands has to cope with. More precisely, we examined whether and under which conditions Dutch Moroccan adolescents legitimize negative meta-stereotypical behavior. We show that Dutch Moroccan teenagers are more willing to legitimize criminal, aggressive, and teenage loitering behavior and Muslim terrorism when they are both relatively negative about the Dutch *and* believe that they are personally seen in terms of the meta-stereotype of their group.

Thus, our studies show that not everybody assimilates to a negative stereotype, and that negative feelings about the outgroup (i.e., prejudice) play a moderating role when it comes to assimilation. Furthermore, our research shows that for this negative behavior to occur on meta-stereotypical dimensions, one must feel *personally* meta-stereotyped. And when these two ingredients are present, people legitimize meta-stereotypical behavior that is clearly negative.

We argue that some people assimilate to a negative meta-stereotype in order to differentiate the ingroup from the outgroup. On the basis of assimilation and contrast models (Spears et al., 2004) we can predict that the specific meta-stereotypical traits are the dimensions along which people will differentiate their ingroup from the outgroup. And, although people in general have a tendency to modify the meta-stereotype about their group in a positive direction when an outgroup is present (Klein & Azzi, 2001), sometimes they might do the opposite. The present research suggests that one of these conditions is the combination of negative prejudice against the outgroup, and the expectation that oneself as a group member is perceived negatively by the same outgroup.

Thus, the explanation of our findings is that, Moroccan teenagers assimilate to a negative meta-stereotype to differentiate their group from the Dutch majority. Jetten, Branscombe, Schmitt, and Spears (2001) also show that people who experience discrimination, differentiate the ingroup from the outgroup and use this differentiation to create a positive identity. In their research they show that when people with body piercings experience discrimination, they “want to shock others” and “want to distinguish themselves” from the mainstream. It might be the case that this differentiating after experienced discrimination is especially important for people who devalue an outgroup. For prejudiced Moroccan teenagers who feel personally meta-stereotyped, assimilation to a negative meta-stereotype can be a way to differentiate the outgroup, and as such serves as a tool to create a positive identity.

It is important to note, however, that this assimilation as a tool to differentiate the ingroup from the outgroup, will occur only when people are both highly prejudiced and feel *negatively meta-stereotyped*. If meta-stereotypes are positive, assimilation effects can also be found (Gordijn et al., 2008). However, in this case not the high prejudiced but the *low* prejudiced are the ones that assimilate. In research by Gordijn et al. (2008), Dutch students activated the meta-stereotype of Dutch being tolerant when they thought that they were going to be evaluated by an American student. Dutch students reported to be more tolerant (in favor of legalization of soft drugs and against repression of prostitution) when they were low on prejudice and had activated the meta-stereotype of being seen as tolerant. The reason that low prejudiced people assimilate to positive meta-stereotypes is probably because they want to reciprocate this positive image. Because being stereotyped (whether it is positive or negative) always has a negative connotation (Sigelman & Tuch, 1997), high prejudiced people are less likely to perceive the positive meta-stereotyping as positive. They are therefore less likely to assimilate when meta-stereotypes are positive.

An alternative explanation of our findings takes valence congruency as the only relevant factor into account; people might simply respond to the expected negative image of the outgroup with negative behavior. Doosje and Haslam (2005) show, for example, that people reciprocate negative stereotypes with negative behavior. In our line of research however, we argue that *both* the content as well as the valence of the meta-stereotype is important in predicting how people will behave. On the basis of assimilation and contrast models (Spears et al., 2004), we argue that the specific traits are the dimensions along which differentiation occurs. However, on the basis of this study, we cannot rule out the possibility that the findings are valence driven, as we did not measure negative behavior that is unrelated to the meta-stereotype. Therefore, further research is needed to rule out this possibility.

Our findings are in line with experimental research by Gordijn et al. (2008). But there are some important differences as well. Gordijn et al. (2008) showed by means of laboratory experiments with university students that prejudiced people assimilate to a negative meta-stereotype when a meta-stereotype is activated. We demonstrate that similar processes can also occur outside the laboratory with a group that is facing serious problems within society.

Another difference is that the participants in the research by Gordijn et al. (2008) thought that they were going to be evaluated by an outgroup member. This anticipated evaluation activates people's meta-stereotypes, probably because participants expect that the outgroup member perceives them in that way. This implies that people need to think that they as a person are perceived in a stereotypical way, for assimilation to occur. Since they do not measure this in their study, it remains unclear whether the activation of the meta-stereotypical traits leads to assimilation, or whether people need to relate these meta-stereotypical traits to themselves. We show that people assimilate when they feel personally meta-stereotyped. This implies that people relate the meta-stereotype to themselves when they expect that they will be evaluated by an outgroup member.

Vorauer et al. (1998) showed in their research that feeling more personally meta-stereotyped leads to less anticipated enjoyment and more anticipated negative emotions when imagining an interaction with an outgroup member of a low status group. These are very interesting findings, but they give only insight in the way high status group members are influenced by

meta-stereotyping. Also, Gordijn et al. (2008) and Oldenhuis et al. (2008) are not specifically interested in the reactions of group members of low status groups. In our study, we chose a group that clearly occupies a low power and status position in society and this is important because these people are precisely the ones that meta-stereotype the most (Lammers et al., 2008).

Possible Limitations and Implications

The nature of this study and the conditions under which it was carried out have some limitations. Due to its correlational nature, we are not able to determine causal relationships. Yet, as our findings are strongly in line with results from experimental studies that manipulated meta-stereotype activation, we are confident that legitimizing negative meta-stereotypical behavior can be seen as a consequence of prejudice and personalized meta-stereotyping. However, given that we only measured legitimization of behavior, it is still unclear whether this would also lead to actual behavior in line with the meta-stereotype.

The current study has several important implications. First of all, the combination of prejudice and feeling personally stereotyped seems to be of importance when it comes to assimilation to a negative meta-stereotype. Since being confronted with a negative stereotype about one's group can lead to a response, which is both potentially harmful for the stereotyped group as well as for society in general, it is of great importance to discover the factors that feed the antagonistic relationship between Moroccan and Dutch people. Moreover, as feeling personally meta-stereotyped is also a prerequisite, it is important to investigate why some people feel personally stereotyped and others do not.

Society should be aware of the fact that the way minority groups think they are perceived is of great importance. The media confirms the idea of Dutch Moroccans that they are seen in a stereotypic way. As we have shown in this research, this might cause some Moroccan teenagers to legitimize negative stereotypical behavior. This is alarming, when you realize that 51% of the Dutch population is suspicious about Muslims (Müller & Van Zijl, 2005). Moroccan youth is confronted with this negative attitude of the Dutch, and this seems to distance them from the Dutch society, and could eventually make them even more open to criminal behavior, less critical toward terrorism and also more open to recognize the far reaching reasoning behind terrorism.

Conclusion

The negative image of Moroccans within the Dutch society does influence Moroccan adolescents. The feeling of being seen as a criminal, aggressive, loitering teenager, or as a terrorist, in combination with negative feelings toward the Dutch stimulates Moroccan teenagers to legitimize this meta-stereotypical behavior. Some of these adolescents might think in the same way as Fouad Mourigh: "Moroccans are discriminated into pieces; we have to destroy this country." Even if they might not be serious about this, it does reveal their frustration, and as such, shows what kind of consequences stereotyping can have.

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APPENDIX

Legitimizing of criminal behavior $\alpha = .57$

Even though I don't have money, I would never steal something (-)
 I think everybody steal something once in a while
 I don't want to have anything to do with pickpockets (-)
 I think that when given the opportunity, everybody will steal sometimes

Legitimizing teenage loitering $\alpha = .74$

It is fun to call people names
 Scaring other people together with your friends is funny
 It feels good when other people are afraid of you and your friends

Legitimizing aggressive behavior $\alpha = .71$

When somebody looks at me in an aggressive way, I don't care and ignore this person (-)
 When somebody has big mouth, I don't let him/her get way with it
 When somebody seeks a fight with me, he/she can have it
 I don't think that it is alright to hit somebody when somebody calls you names(-)
 I think that people who do nothing when provoked are pussies
 When somebody harms you, you should get back to him/her the hard way

Legitimizing Muslim terrorism

People who conduct aggressive behavior in name of the Jihad understand the Koran well.