

YOUNG ISRAELIS' REACTIONS TO THE RABIN ASSASSINATION: TWO PERSPECTIVES

AMIRAM RAVIV, ORA SILBERSTEIN,
ALONA RAVIV, and AVI SADEH

ALONA RAVIV, and AVI SADEH

Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel

The study analyzed the responses of 713 Israeli adolescents, aged 12–17, to 3 open questions regarding their behavior following Rabin's assassination. Participants' explanations for their own behavior and for the youth's behavior as a whole were analyzed and compared. Adolescents responded mainly with pain and authentic grief. Because explanations were elicited from two different perspectives, results of the comparison were discussed with reference to the actor—observer hypothesis (E. E. Jones & R. E. Nisbett, 1972). Participants' responses were also analyzed as a function of gender, age and political stance. Girls, older children, and supporters of Rabin's peace policy expressed their grief more strongly.

On November 4th, 1995, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by a fellow Israeli and religious Jew. The event was a profound shock to the Israeli people, and strong reactions of pain and mourning ensued. Although the majority of the population responded in this way, the reaction of the Israeli youth was particularly salient. For days, hundreds of teenagers gathered at the site of the assassination and other significant places, sitting in circles, lighting candles and singing songs lamenting Rabin's death. This sudden and spontaneous outburst of mass ritualistic behavior was a surprise, and it drew the attention of the media and was a constant topic of reports and discussion for weeks after the assassination. According to various journalists and

Received 26 February 2001; accepted 21 August 2001.

We thank the school principals for their cooperation. The study was supported by the Internal Research Fund of Tel Aviv University.

Address correspondence to Amiram Raviv, Department of Psychology, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv 69978, Israel. E-mail: raviv@post.tau.ac.il

commentators (Raviv, Silberstein, & Benzer, 1998), Rabin had not been particularly beloved of adolescents, and young Israelis were considered politically indifferent. Many adults were puzzled by the scope and intensity of the youth's reaction and its significance and attempted to explain their unique collective behavior in commentaries in the media (Raviv et al., 1998), calling it "the youth phenomenon." Researchers also noted this phenomenon and made more systematic scientific attempts to analyze it. Witztum and Malkinson (1998) wrote:

A flow of youngsters filled the city square where the assassination occurred, singing and lighting candles, crying, grieving, writing songs and letters, and refusing to leave the site, in a way detached from the experts' efforts to understand and explain the tragic death. Ironically, by doing so, the youngsters became yet another subject for analysis. (p. 123).

For example, an attempt was made to analyze a sample of several hundreds of letters from among the tens of thousands written by youngsters to Rabin's family (Lieblich, 1997); about two months after the assassination Rapoport (1997) interviewed teenagers chosen to represent a number of sub-groups in Israeli society; and Raviv, Sadeh, Raviv, and Silberstein (1998) conducted a systematic study of over 700 teenagers using a questionnaire including some 20 multiple choice and open-ended questions, in an attempt to measure and analyze their responses and patterns of participation in mourning rituals. (The study analyzed only the multiple-choice questions.) Klingman, Shalev, and Pearlman (2000) and Klingman and Shalev (2001) examined the youth's reactions as expressed through the graffiti drawn on the Municipality Building walls in Tel-Aviv (the site of the assassination), and Klingman (2001) studied the reactions of 4th-grade children two days after the event. All these studies found emotional reactions typical of feelings of loss, mourning, and bereavement following a major crisis.

Personal accounts given by trauma victims are increasingly recognized as valuable documents for research purposes and for gaining greater understanding and insight into the phenomenon of national trauma (Witztum & Malkinson, 1998). On the basis of this strategy, the present study proceeds to analyze what the youth themselves thought about the "youth phenomenon" using three open-ended questions from Raviv et al.'s (1998) questionnaire. Open-ended questions are more difficult to analyze methodically, but they do not dictate answers and can provide a more authentic flavor of people's experiences. This is

particularly important in unexpected situations when there are no pre-existing research instruments. Participants' responses to the assassination were explored from two perspectives: an introspective one explaining their own mourning behaviors, and an objective one explaining the youth's mourning reaction in general, from an observing point of view. These two perspectives were then compared to show how variables such as political stance and point of outlook (i.e., observer vs. actor) affected the way young Israelis understood and explained their reactions to Rabin's assassination. We believe that such an inquiry could deepen our own understanding of the youth, and through this our understanding of adolescence and adolescents' reactions to political trauma (Vertzberger, 1997) related to the violent death of a national leader (Oren & Peterson, 1967; Wolfenstein & Kliman, 1965).

Method

Participants

Participants were 713 junior high and high school students, including 394 girls and 319 boys, grades 7 to 12, divided into three age groups: Grades 7–8 (approximately ages 12–13), Grades 9–10 (approximately ages 14–15), and Grades 11–12 (approximately ages 16–17). These students came from two large schools located in north Tel Aviv and a neighboring town. The majority of the population in these schools comes from middle- and upper-middle class homes; the lower classes are underrepresented in the sample, creating a bias in favor of Rabin supporters. Table 1 presents the participants' distribution according to gender, age group, and political stance.

The Questionnaire

A questionnaire designed for the purpose of assessing the youth's reaction to Rabin's assassination (Raviv et al., 1998) included various multiple choice and open-ended questions, as well as gathering data regarding age, gender, and attitudes toward Rabin's peace policy before the assassination. Pre-assassination attitude (Political Stance) was measured by the question, "Before the assassination, did you support or oppose the

TABLE 1 The Participants by Gender, Age Group, and Political Stance

Participants	Youngest (Grade 7–8)	Middle (Grade 9–10)	Oldest (Grade 11–12)	Total
Boys				
Supporters	81	67	53	201
No stance	28	14	12	54
Opponents	15	23	20	58
No answer	4	2	—	6
Total boys	128	106	85	319
Girls				
Supporters	69	83	76	228
No stance	28	34	24	86
Opponents	21	17	31	69
No answer	4	5	2	11
Total girls	122	139	133	394
Total	250	245	218	713

peace policy initiated by Rabin as prime minister? (a. I supported it; b. I was opposed to it; c. I had no opinion).” The present study analyzed participants’ responses to three open-ended questions from this questionnaire. The first question inquired, “What did you do during the first week following the assassination? List the activities and behaviors you were involved in with regard to Rabin’s death.” The second question asked, “Why did you choose to participate in these activities?” This question attempted to elicit introspective material regarding each participant’s own motivations for acting the way he or she did. The third question was formulated in a manner requiring respondents to take an objective stand as commentators. Although formulated differently from the first question, it was also designed to elicit explanations for the youth’s mourning reactions. It read, “Adults were surprised by the reaction of the youth and by their behavior following Rabin’s assassination. Various explanations were given for it. How do you, as a teenager, explain the youth’s reaction?”

Procedure

Immediately after the seven days of mourning, approval to conduct the study in the chosen schools was obtained from the Ministry of Education and from the school principals and teachers. Three graduate students in

the Clinical Child Psychology program administered the questionnaires to 24 classrooms within a period of 10 to 17 days after the day of the assassination. The majority of participants cooperated eagerly, expressing interest in the questionnaire. After completing the questionnaire, each class was debriefed on the goals of the study.

The answers obtained in response to the three open-ended questions were sorted into content categories, separately for each question. Responses to the questions were given in the form of sentences, which often were long and involved. Therefore, each response was read and marked for the main idea or ideas it contained; responses were gathered under the same category whenever they expressed a similar idea. When a response contained more than one idea or content area, it was listed under the relevant categories. This process produced several dozens of categories for each question. These categories were then grouped into a smaller number of wider categories by three judges. When agreement was not reached between the judges (for a small percentage of responses), they were included under a miscellaneous category and deleted from analysis. At the end of this process, a small number of final categories were obtained, mapping the material into content areas.

Results

Following are the categories for each of the three questions, listed according to the percentage of participants who used them, from the most to the least often used.

Question 1: "What did you do during the first week following the assassination? List the activities and behaviors you were involved in with regard to Rabin's death."

1. Visited a symbolically significant site (59%; e.g., the scene of the assassination, Rabin's home, Rabin's grave)
2. Lit or distributed memorial candles (22%)
3. Participated in a memorial rally or demonstration (20%)
4. Brought or sent tributes to a significant place (11%; e.g., laid flowers on the grave; prepared a letter, poem or drawing and left them at the site of the assassination; sent them to Rabin's widow or the Knesset; drew graffiti)
5. Unrealized intention to do something (4%)

6. Sang songs in a public place, with other people (3%)
7. Political activity (1%; e.g., signed a petition for peace, joined a leftist youth movement)
8. None of the above (31%; this category included non-ritual activities, such as watching the news on TV, reading newspapers, and talking about the assassination with family or friends)

A logistic regression was conducted to compare respondents indicating they had participated in ritual activity and those who had not. The predictors were gender, age group, and political stance (Rabin supporters, Rabin opponents, or those without a stance), including all two-way interactions. All three main effects were significant: girls participated more than boys (74% and 63%, respectively), Wald = 7.43, $p < .01$; the youngest age-group participated less than the middle and the oldest age-groups (56%, 76%, and 76%, respectively), Wald = 26.13, $p < .01$; and supporters participated more than those with no stance and opponents (76%, 60%, and 54%, respectively), Wald = 30.92, $p < .01$. No significant interactions were found.

Question 2: "Why did you choose to perform these activities?"

(Analysis of this question was carried out only for respondents who participated in a ritual activity, i.e., categories 1–7 of the first question; $N = 488$.)

1. Grief emotions (40%). Responses explaining the motivation for performing various activities as derived from the intense emotions aroused by the assassination, which we have named "emotions of grief." For example, "Because of the shock," "Out of sadness," or a desire to express such emotions publicly.
2. Mourning and funeral customs, and to pay last respects (34%). Responses explaining motivation as arising from a desire to carry out the customary rites and pay respect to Rabin. Common responses were "Because I wanted to pay him last respects," "Out of respect for Rabin," and "To commemorate Rabin."
3. Desire to convey a message, or feel I had done something (23%). Responses showing that the assassination made the respondent want to react actively, whether in deeds or by conveying a message or opinion. (e.g., "To show I care," "To be involved," "To express my views," "To convey my support to Rabin's family").
4. The need to be together (23%). Responses perceiving the individual as part of a group or society (e.g., "To be with other people," "So as not

- to be alone,” “To be part of the nation,” “The need to be united”) or mentioning the need to see how others were affected, “I wondered how other people were acting, feeling.”
5. A sense of duty (20%). Responses beginning with the words “Out of a sense of duty,” sometimes adding “as a citizen,” “towards myself,” or “towards Rabin.” Also included were responses such as “It is important,” “It is right,” and “It is necessary.”
 6. Rabin the figure (i.e., his public image in his lifetime) (17%). Responses expressing admiration and adoration towards Rabin: “Because he was a dear/great/important/honorable man,” “Because he was the PM [prime minister] and did a lot for the country.”
 7. Not from sorrow over Rabin (5%). Responses showing no strong emotional involvement with the event or that participation in activities was because of secondary reasons. For example, some said they had been part of an organized group and had not chosen this activity freely. Other responses may have expressed cynicism, or perhaps they were simply candid. For example, “I went there [to the square] for the singers.” Other responses included “I was in the area,” “Out of boredom,” “Just because,” and “For no reason.”
 8. Guilt (4%). Responses expressing guilt for not having done enough beforehand, a desire to atone for past behavior or the need to express shame, remorse or to ask forgiveness just for the fact that such a thing could have happened.

Logistic regressions were conducted for each category on use of that category, with gender, age group, and political stance as the independent variables, including all the two-way interactions. Table 2 presents the results only for those categories used by at least 10% of the respondents.

In the first category, “Grief emotions,” a main effect of gender was found, with girls using this category more often than boys (44% and 34%, respectively). Also found was a main effect of age, with the older and the middle age groups using the category more often than the younger age group (44%, 44%, and 30%, respectively). In the second category, “Mourning and funeral rites,” a main effect of gender was found, with girls using this response more often than boys (37% and 32%, respectively). An interaction between gender and age was found whereby girls used this category more than boys in the youngest age group (46% and 25%, respectively), whereas no differences were found

TABLE 2 Results of Logistic Regressions (Wald Statistic) for Use of Response Categories to the Self-Reference Question, by Gender, Age Group, and Political Stance ($N = 488$)

Category	Effect				
	Gender ($df = 1$)	Age ($df = 2$)	Political stance ($df = 2$)	G $\times$ A ($df = 2$)	G $\times$ P ($df = 2$)
Grief emotions	5.42*	6.87*	—	—	—
Mourning rites, Last respects	6.02*	—	—	6.50*	6.37*
Message or action	5.70*	—	—	6.99*	

Note. G $\times$ A = Gender $\times$ Age; G $\times$ P = Gender $\times$ Political stance.

* $p < .05$.

in the other age groups. In the third category, “Desire to convey a message or feel I had done something,” a main effect of gender was found, with girls using this category more often than boys (26% and 18%, respectively). An interaction between gender and age was also found, in which girls in the middle age group used this category more often than boys (29% and 8%, respectively), while in the remaining groups, boys used it as often as girls. No effects were found in the remaining categories.

Question 3: “Grownups were surprised by the youth’s reaction and behavior following Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination. Various explanations were given for it. How do you, as a teenager, explain the youth’s reaction?” (Analysis of this question was carried out for the entire sample; $N = 713$)

1. Grief emotions (37%). Responses in this category stated that the youth’s behavior was motivated by the intense emotions aroused by the assassination, including sadness, pain, and shock.
2. Rabin was important to the youth (with reference to peace, 33%). Responses describing a special connection between Rabin and the youth, because Rabin represented a hope for peace and, being future soldiers, they would gain the most from it. For example, “The youth are the first to gain from the peace process because then they will not have to go to the army.” Many responses also emphasized Rabin’s special concern for young people. Others focused on Rabin’s relationship with young people irrespective of the peace issue: “Rabin was a leader and teacher for the youth, a role model,”

"The youth felt close to the PM, who visited schools and was nice to them."

3. Desire to convey a message, or feel they had done something (18%). Responses showing that the assassination aroused a desire to react, whether in action or by expressing a message or opinion carrying ideological content. Also included were responses stating that the event aroused a need to feel strong, or led to an experience of strength. Examples: "The youth feel it is all up to them and they will be the ones to determine the country's future," "The assassination opened their eyes and forced them to get involved in what was happening," "The youth's behavior was intended to show grownups where they had failed, and to awaken them and make them change things," "The youth wanted to feel strong."
4. The reaction is not surprising (15%). These statements seem to be in response to the wording of the question, claiming there is no difference between youth and adults and sometimes expressing resentment at grownups' low expectations. For example, "The youth understand things and react to them just like adults, and the surprise is because they didn't expect the youth to react this way," "The reaction is normal," "The youth represent the people, they are part of the nation and reflect whatever happens in the country," "Grownups don't know teenagers."
5. Explanations reflecting criticism of the youth's reaction (10%). Responses explaining the youth's reaction not as a result of sorrow or shock; most express some criticism, whereas some simply analyze rationally. Critical responses include "It's all a show," "The youth are a bunch of phonies," "This is an extreme and non-representative reaction," "Because of the singer's performances," and "So they could be on TV." Some expressed hostility and derogation: "They're very stupid," "This only happens to screwed-up youth," "They're just little kids." Psychological—analytical explanations included "They needed to cry about something," "They needed to hold on to something, not necessarily Rabin," "Teenagers like to feel 'down' together," "It's a herd reaction," "Peer pressure," "They were looking for attention," "They were happy for a chance to feel together," and "The rally [after the mourning] became a social event, a festival." Another subgroup of responses emphasized the external influence of adult-led organizations: "The youth belong to social frameworks like school and youth movements, which directed them to react this

way,” “The youth were affected by the media,” and “The youth go wherever they’re led.”

6. Rabin the figure (10%). These responses expressed admiration for and adoration of Rabin, “because he was a dear/great/important/honorable man,” “Because he was the prime minister and did a lot for the country.”
7. Psychological needs (10%). Many responses in this category stated the need to be together, to share the pain and a sense of belonging. Other psychological explanations were the need for emotional outlet, reduction and release of tension, finding a way to cope with the situation, an internal drive, a spiritual response, the need to feel close to Rabin, the need to express grief, and “To open our hearts.”
8. A sense of loss (9%). One type of loss expressed in these responses was related to Rabin himself: the loss of a leader, father figure, grandfather, or member of the family; the loss of a close, dear person, an admired figure, a fulfiller of dreams, the loss of a protective figure, a man who gave a sense of security, or “someone who was close to them, who was like them.” Other responses referred to the loss of abstract values (e.g., security; Rabin’s ideals, achievements or vision; the loss of honor, innocence, faith in the unity of the nation).
9. Care, concern (6%). Responses stating simply that the youth acted the way they did “because they cared,” “The youth cares and is concerned about the country’s future,” “The youth feel involved,” and “It is an important issue to the youth.”
10. Mourning and funeral customs (6%). Responses explaining the youth’s reaction as a way to participate in traditional mourning rites and to share in the country’s sorrow. “The youth want to pay their last respects,” “To commemorate Rabin,” “To thank him and say farewell.”
11. Qualities and traits unique to adolescents (4%). Responses suggesting that adolescents’ attributes distinguish them from other age groups and make them particularly sensitive and vulnerable to the event, or shape their unique response. For example, “Teenagers aren’t used to dealing with things like this, they are not as experienced with death,” “Teenagers are more sensitive and vulnerable than grown-ups,” “Teenagers have a different intensity of feelings than grownups,” and “Adolescence is a time in life when you begin to ask questions and have an opinion, an age when the personality is formed, and new

emotions arise." References to the style of the reaction included "The reaction suits their age: it's hard to imagine grownups sitting in the square and singing," "Teenagers show their feelings more than grownups do," "They react more radically and romantically," and "They are bolder/braver."

12. Guilt and remorse (3%). These responses explained the youth's reaction as the result of guilt and remorse for not having done enough, and a wish to atone for what happened.

Logistic regressions were carried out as for Question 1. Table 3 presents the results only for those categories used by at least 10% of the respondents.

In the first category, Grief Emotions, a main effect of gender was found in which girls used this category more often than boys (45% and 28%, respectively). Also, a main effect of age was found in which the age-oldest group used this category more often than the youngest or the middle-age group (46%, 34%, and 33%, respectively). In the second category, Rabin was Important to the Youth, a main effect of political stance was found whereby supporters used this category more often than opponents or those with no stance (37%, 24%, and 25%, respectively). In the third category, Desire to Convey a Message, all three main effects were significant. Girls used this category more often than boys (22% and 14%, respectively); the youngest age group used it less often than the

TABLE 3 Results of Logistic Regressions (Wald Statistic) for Use of Response Categories to the Other-Reference Question, by Gender, Age Group, and Political Stance ($N = 713$)

Category	Effect			
	Gender ($df = 1$)	Age ($df = 2$)	Political stance ($df = 2$)	G $\times$ A ($df = 2$)
Grief emotions	20.96**	7.56*	—	—
Rabin important to youth	—	—	12.62**	—
Message or action	6.33*	18.59**	7.95*	—
Not surprising	—	—	—	—
Critical analysis	—	11.48**	6.74*	—
Rabin's figure	—	—	—	6.62*

Note. G $\times$ A = Gender $\times$ Age.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

middle and oldest age groups (10%, 20%, and 27, respectively); and supporters used it more often than opponents and those with no stance (22%, 14%, and 14%, respectively). In the fourth category, no effect was found. In the fifth category, Critical Explanations, a main effect of age was found, with the youngest age group using this category less than both the middle and the oldest age groups (4%, 13%, and 13%, respectively). A political stance main effect was also found, with supporters using this category less than opponents (8% and 17%, respectively). Those with no stance were not significantly different either from supporters or opponents (10%). In the sixth category, Rabin the Figure, an interaction was found, with insignificant post-hoc differences.

Comparison between the Self-Reference and the Other-Reference Questions

We next compared the list of categories for Questions 2 and 3 (self- and other-reference). Seven response categories were represented in both questions; one category was unique to the self-reference question, and five categories were unique to other-reference question. Comparisons were conducted only for respondents who indicated they had participated in ritual mourning activities ($N = 488$). Table 4 presents these comparisons and a statistical analysis of the differences between the percent of respondents using them in response to each question, using a sign-test.

Discussion

The research of young people in Israeli society has been described as limited, captivated by a "youth ethos," and contributing to its prevalence (Rapoport, Lomsky-Feder, Rash, Dar, & Adler, 1995). It has been claimed that various assumptions regarding the youth, adopted by the academic community, have never been examined from the viewpoint of the youth themselves. This study is an exception in that it approached the youth directly about their perceptions and explanations for their own and others' behavior of in response to Rabin's assassination. After asking them to list the ritual mourning activities in which they had participated, we asked each one to explain why he or she chose to join these activities, and then how they explained "the youth's mourning reaction" as observers. Asking the same question from two different perspectives

TABLE 4 Comparison (Sign-Test Results) between Percentages of Respondents Using the Self-Reference Question and the Other-Reference Question Categories ($N = 488$)

Name of Category	Question 2 (self-reference)			Question 3 (other-reference)			z
	n	%	Use rank	n	%	Use rank	
Grief emotions	195	40.0	1	184	37.7	1	.69
Mourning and funeral rites	168	34.4	2	32	6.6	10	10.67**
Message or action	112	23.0	3	99	20.3	3	-.96
Need to be together (self-ref), Psychological needs (other-ref) ^a	112	23.0	4	54	11.1	7	4.96**
Sense of duty	97	19.9	5	—	—	—	9.75**
Rabin the figure	82	16.8	6	49	10.0	6	2.98**
Not from grief over Rabin (self-ref), critical analysis (other-ref) ^b	22	4.5	7	51	10.5	5	-3.58**
Guilt	18	3.7	8	22	4.5	12	-0.51
Rabin was important to the youth (because of peace)	—	—	—	172	35.2	2	-13.04**
The reaction is not surprising	—	—	—	80	16.4	4	-8.83**
A sense of loss	—	—	—	47	9.6	8	-6.71**
Caring and concern	—	—	—	36	7.4	9	-5.83**
Qualities unique to adolescents	—	—	—	24	4.9	11	-4.69**

Note. The rank ordering of the categories are in accordance with the percentage of users out of the total sample ($N = 713$). Self-ref. = Self-reference; other-ref. = other-reference.

^a In the self-reference question, "Need to be together" represented a category in itself; in the other-reference question, responses mentioning this need were grouped with other psychological needs, forming the category "Psychological needs". Because the difference between the two categories is significant, it can be inferred that the difference between the percent of respondents mentioning the need to be together in each question is also significant.

^b These categories were compared because they expressed the same general idea, namely that the participation in mourning rites was for reasons other than genuine grief.

** $p < .01$.

can yield different answers with different frequencies. This discussion regards the similarities and differences between responses to these two questions.

We will first discuss the categories that were equally popular in response to both questions. The most frequent response was that the

motivation for the ritual behavior was emotional. This was also the most common explanation offered by various adult commentators in the newspapers (Raviv et al., 1998). Our finding is in line with research conducted following political trauma (Suedfeld, 1997; Vertzberger, 1997), showing that the violent death of a national leader is a traumatic event leading to grief reactions in the population at large, including the youth (Oren & Peterson, 1967; Siegel, 1977; Wolfenstein & Kliman, 1965). The similarly high frequency of this category in response to both questions testifies to the genuine nature of the respondents' grief, because it appears both in introspection and as an attribution to others. Another category that was equally popular in response to both questions was the "desire to convey a message"—a common characteristic of adolescence related to the search for and crystallization of a personal and social identity (Harter, 1990; Offer, Ostrov, & Howard, 1984).

However, the most interesting finding in this study concerns the differences that arose in response to these two questions (i.e., the differences between the way the youth explained their own behavior and the way they explained the behavior of others). Such a comparison can give us some indication of the differences between the way the respondents understand themselves and the way they understand others.

The results of this comparison can be largely understood in light of the actor—observer phenomenon in cognitive theory, studied by Jones and Nisbett (1972). These researchers have shown that the person performing an act, and the person observing the act being performed by someone else, will explain the actor's motivation differently. Observers tend to implicate the actor's personality traits as underlying his actions, whereas actors tend to implicate circumstances and situational attributes. This tendency is usually explained as resulting from perceptual differences: the actor's attention is focused outwards on environmental stimuli, hence the actor's explanations will be concerned with external conditions; the observer's attention is focused on the actor, and his explanations therefore focus on attributes of the actor. The comparison between responses to the self-reference and other-reference questions juxtaposes explanations given from the actor perspective and from the observer perspective regarding the same behavior, and thus can be analyzed according to this model. It is noteworthy that in our study, the comparison is made between participant and participant/observer, because the "youth reaction" includes the observers' own reaction. We felt

that this in fact reinforces the actor—observer interpretation of the results, because a respondent asked to explain the same action carried out by himself and by another would be expected to give a similar explanation, and the fact that different explanations were given emphasizes the strength of the actor—observer effect.

The greatest difference in popularity when comparing responses to the two questions was seen in the response, “Rabin was important to the youth particularly because of peace.” This was the second most popular explanation in response to the other-reference question, although none mentioned it to explain their own behavior. This surprising result can be explained using the actor—observer theory: Observers focused on actor characteristics (i.e., the mourners’ desire for and special interest in peace and their appreciation of Rabin’s efforts to bring peace). Another explanation is the influence of the media, which undoubtedly played a major role in shaping the national mourning pattern (Witztum & Malkinson, 1998). Perhaps the connection between Rabin and peace, made so prominent by the media following the assassination (Raviv et al., 1998), was relatively new to the youth and was not truly internalized, remaining a mere slogan. It is questionable whether these “Rabin youth” had been deeply and intensely aware of the political process Rabin was attempting to advance or of the connection between his aspirations and their own personal future, but when asked to take the position of interpreters, respondents “adopted” the popular media message.

The category of Mourning and Funeral Rites represented a sense of commitment and obligation toward something external—either Rabin himself or some moral value—and was used more often to explain self-behavior and far less to explain the behavior of others. A similar category, A Sense of Duty, was not mentioned at all in response to the other-reference question but was used by almost 20% to explain their own behavior. Both responses focus on situation-related and not actor-related factors. This may also explain why “Rabin the Figure” was used more to explain self than other-behavior.

The category Explanations Reflecting Criticism of the Youth’s Reaction was used more frequently in response to the other-reference question than its counterpart in the self-reference question, “Not from sorrow over Rabin.” Once again, the actor—observer phenomenon suggests that explanations pertaining to the actors’ internal motivations should be more likely to emerge in response to the other-reference than to the self-reference question. The concept of projection also suggests that

it is easier to criticize others than oneself, and to attribute to others unflattering explanations for their behavior. In examining their own behavior, participants may have emphasized the authenticity of their motivation and the genuineness of their emotions, whereas any doubts in this respect were projected onto others. Finally, when focusing on others it is easier to point out ulterior motives. This is more difficult to do when examining oneself, especially under the extreme circumstances that followed the assassination, when propriety demanded expressions of deep and heart-felt grief.

The actor—observer phenomenon can also explain why “A sense of loss; Caring and concern,” and “Qualities unique to adolescents” were given only in response to the other-reference question, because these are all actor attributes. “The reaction is not surprising” in response to the other-reference question seems to be an artifact of the phrasing of the question, beginning with the words “Grownups were surprised . . .,” which apparently aroused some resentment.

The need to be together can be understood in terms of Schachter’s (1959) work on the relationship between stress and affiliation. Schachter that people facing an unfamiliar threat experience an increased desire to affiliate with others, particularly with those facing a similar threat, who then serve as a source of information and an indication for assessing the intensity, nature, or appropriateness of one’s emotional state. The response category Need to be Together was used significantly more often to explain self-behavior, and even when grouped with various other psychological needs, this response was less popular in explaining others. The category focused on personal, internal motivation, and its higher frequency in explaining self-behavior is thus inconsistent with the actor—observer phenomenon. One explanation for this result is the limited explanatory power of the actor—observer theory. People still have more access to their own feelings and internal processes, particularly intense emotions that strongly draw one’s attention, such as anxiety and fear. Of course, observers cannot always detect all the actor’s internal motivations.

We now turn to findings associated with the independent variables of gender, age, and political stance in each question.

Analysis of our first question showed that significantly more girls reported having participated in mourning rituals than boys (although the number of boys was also substantial). The fact that girls are generally more expressive of their emotions than boys and express these emotions

in various forms is extensively supported by the literature (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1991; Goodman, Brumley, Schwartz, & Purcell, 1993; Kazdin, 1990; Vogel & Verneberg, 1993). Consistently, girls used the explanation category of Mourning Rites more often than boys to explain their own behavior.

Girls mentioned Grief Emotions to explain both their own and others' behavior more often than boys. Once again, this is in line with the research literature, which consistently shows that females more readily report feeling grief and crisis emotions than males (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1991; Goodman et al., 1993; Kazdin, 1990; Meshot & Leitner, 1992–1993; Vogel & Verneberg, 1993), and hence are also more apt to attribute such feelings to others.

With regard to age, the youngest respondents reported the least participation in mourning activities compared with the other two age groups. This may be because some of the major ritual sites were located far from their homes, and the youngest children were naturally more limited in their traveling possibilities.

The youngest respondents used the explanation of Grief emotions less often than the other age groups, perhaps because of their more limited political awareness and involvement (Hess & Torney, 1967; Raviv et al., 1998). In explaining the behavior of others, the youngest and middle age groups also used the emotional explanation less than the older, more politically involved children. The differences in degree of political involvement can also explain age-differences in the use of two additional response categories: The Desire to Convey a Message and Critical Analysis. Additionally, these categories demand a capacity for introspection and analysis, reflecting the ability for psychological conceptualization. Montemayor and Eisen (1977) found cognitive ability, which gradually changes with age from concrete to abstract, to be a factor in the capacity for self-perception, self-concept, and the perception of others. Hence younger adolescents describe themselves in more concrete terms than older adolescents, who use more abstract and analytical terms. In our study, the frequency of these responses was found to rise with age. This can be explained by the increased ability to conceptualize, which accompanies cognitive development (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958; Keating, 1993).

Respondents' political stance and their positions and attitudes toward Rabin's peace policy were a major explanatory variable for differences in the youth's behavioral and emotional responses. Rabin supporters

participated in ritual mourning activities significantly more than opponents did, as reflected in their responses to the first question. Because our analysis of the self-reference question only included respondents who reported participating in ritual activities, the population was even more selectively pro-Rabin than it was at the outset, when we began with a pro-Rabin bias resulting from the relatively high socioeconomic level of the sample (Arian, 1995). This made it difficult to find significant differences between supporters and non-supporters in the choice of response categories.

The analysis of the other-reference question, however, included respondents who hadn't participated in any ritual activities, thus potentially increasing the number of Rabin opponents. We may hypothesize that many Rabin opponents did participate in ceremonial activities, but not necessarily voluntarily. The following significant differences were found between supporters and opponents of Rabin's peace policy.

More Rabin supporters than opponents used the explanations "Rabin was important to the youth because of peace," and "The desire to convey a message." Rabin supporters may have felt that their participation in mourning rituals served as a kind of protest and demonstration, carrying a political and social message (Raviv et al., 1998). On the other hand, more Rabin opponents used the Critical analysis response than supporters, expressing in this way their skeptical attitude and their more distant and emotionally uninvolved vantage point. Many of these responses to the other-reference question expressed severe criticism of the youth's behavior and conveyed a tone of anger, mockery and derogation. Research has shown that reactions to trauma are affected by the extent to which the trauma is experienced as a personal loss (Nader & Pynoos, 1993). It seems that in our study, responses differentiating on the basis of political stance reflect an ideological closeness or distance from the leader that determines the way events are perceived in extreme circumstances such as the assassination of the leader (Raviv et al., 1998). American Democrats similarly expressed deeper feelings of bereavement than Republicans following the Kennedy assassination (Sigel, 1965).

To conclude, this study attempted to examine the motivations for the youth's unexpected mass ritual response to the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. We have not attempted to discover the "right" answer to this intriguing question but only to point out some possible directions. In contrast to various commentators and journalists, who

offered speculative explanations based on their own opinions or theoretical knowledge (Raviv et al., 1998), this study asked the youth directly for their own feelings. The subject, considered from two different perspectives by asking respondents why they acted as they did and why they believed others acted this way, was thus enriched by further insight. Results show it is reasonable to assume that the majority of young Israelis who participated in various ceremonial activities, particularly girls and Rabin supporters, were acting spontaneously and authentically, although also motivated by various personal and collective psychological needs. The death of a leader, particularly by assassination, is a shocking event that evokes projection of deep emotions and various personal unfinished issues, especially in adolescents who experience themselves as a more vulnerable group. Adolescents face a number of unique cognitive and psychological developmental tasks, including emotional separation and individuation from parents (Harris, 1991, Meshot & Leitner, 1992–1993), and therefore the processes of adolescence and the working through of grief are similar, both involving adaptation to the loss of cherished objects, coping with changed inner and external realities, and dealing with the ambivalence and conflicts that are an inseparable part of the phases of separation and loss (Fleming & Adolph, 1986). Their increased sensitivity makes adolescents' reactions to loss more intense (Meshot & Leitner, 1992–1993), while their emerging social and political identities also contribute to the shaping of their reactions under circumstances of political trauma.

References

- Arian, A. (1995). *Security threatened*. Tel Aviv, Israel: Tel Aviv University, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies & Cambridge University Press.
- Fleming, S. J., & Adolph, R. (1986). Helping bereaved adolescents: Needs and responses. In C. A. Corr & J. N. McNeil (Eds.), *Adolescence and death* (pp. 97–118). New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Frydenberg, E., & Lewis, R. (1991). Adolescent coping: The different ways in which boys and girls cope. *Journal of Adolescence*, 14(2), 119–133.
- Goodman, S. H., Brumley, H. E., Schwartz, K. R., & Purcell, D. W. (1993). Gender and age in relation between stress and children's school adjustment. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 13, 329–345.
- Harris, E. S. (1991). Adolescent bereavement following the death of a parent: An exploratory study. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development*, 21, 267–281.

- Harter, S. (1990). Self and identity development. In S. S. Feldman & G. R. Elliot (Eds.), *At the threshold: The developing adolescent* (pp. 325–387). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hess, R., & Torney, J. (1967). *The development of political attitudes in children*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Inhelder, B., & Piaget, J. (1958). *The growth of logical thinking from childhood to adolescence*. New York: Basic Books.
- Jones, E. E., & Nisbett, R. E. (1972). The actor and the observer: Divergent perceptions of the causes of behavior. In E. E. Jones, D. Kanouse, H. H. Kelly, R. E. Nisbett, S. Valins & B. Weiner (Eds.), *Attribution: Perceiving the causes of behavior* (pp. 79–94). New York: General Learning Press.
- Kazdin, A. E. (1990). Childhood depression. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 31, 121–160.
- Keating, D. P. (1993). Adolescent thinking. In S. S. Feldman & G. R. Elliot, (Eds.) *At the threshold* (pp. 54–89). Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.
- Klingman, A. (2001). Israeli children's reactions to the assassination of the Prime Minister. *Death Studies*, 25, 33–49.
- Klingman, A., & Shalev, R. (2001). Voices of Israeli youth following the assassination of the Prime Minister. *Youth and Society*, 32, 403–420.
- Klingman, A., Shalev, R., & Pearlman, A. (2000). Graffiti: A creative means of youth coping with collective trauma. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 27, 299–307.
- Liebllich, A. (1997, March 1–3). *Letters of the youth to the Rabin family a week after the assassination—What do they relate?* Paper presented in the International Conference, The Modern State and Political Assassination, Yitzhak Rabin Center, Tel Aviv, Israel.
- Messhot, C. M., & Leitner, L. M. (1992–1993). Adolescent mourning and parental death. *Omega Journal of Death and Dying*, 26, 287–299.
- Montemayor, R., & Eisen, M. (1977). The development of self-conceptions from childhood to adolescence. *Developmental Psychology*, 13, 314–319.
- Nader, K., & Pynoos, R. S. (1993). The children of Kuwait after the Gulf War. In L. A. Leavitt & N. A. Fox, *The psychological effects of war and violence on children* (pp. 181–195). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Offer, D., Ostrov, E., & Howard, K. I. (1984). *Patterns of adolescent self image*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Oren, K., & Peterson, P. (1967). Presidential assassination: A case in the dynamics of political socialization. *Journal of Politics*, 29, 388–404.
- Rapoport, T. (1997). *The many voices of Israeli youth: Multiple interpretations of the assassination of Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin*. Jerusalem, Israel: NCJW Research Institute for Innovation in Education.
- Rapoport, T., Lomsky-Feder, E., Rash, N., Dar, Y., & Adler, C. (1995). Youngsters and youth in Israeli society. In H. Flum (Ed.), *Adolescents in Israel: Personal, familial & social aspects* (pp. 17–40). Even Yehuda, Israel: Reches Publishing.
- Raviv, A., Sadeh, A., Raviv, A., & Silberstein, O. (1998). The reaction of the youth in Israel to the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. *Political Psychology*, 19, 255–278.
- Raviv, A., Silberstein, O., and Benzer, N. (1998). *The Israeli youth's reaction to Rabin's assassination as interpreted in the Israeli press*. Unpublished manuscript.

- Schachter, S. (1959). *The psychology of affiliation*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Siegel, L. S. (1977). Children and adolescents' reactions to the assassination of Martin Luther King: A study of political socialization. *Developmental Psychology*, 13, 284–285.
- Sigel, R. S. (1965). An exploration into some aspects of political socialization: School child's reactions to the death of a president. In M. Wolfenstein & G. Kliman (Eds.), *Children and the death of a president* (pp. 30–61). Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Suedfeld, P. (1997). Reactions to societal trauma: Distress and/or eustress. *Political Psychology*, 18, 849–861.
- Vertzberger, Y. I. (1997) The antinomies of collective political trauma: A pre-theory. *Political Psychology*, 18, 863–876.
- Vogel, J. M., & Vernberg, E. M. (1993). Children's psychological responses to disasters. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 22, 464–484.
- Witztum, E., & Malkinson, R. (1998). In E. S. Zinner & M. B. Williams (Eds.), *When a community weeps* (pp. 119–137). Brunner/Mazel.
- Wolfenstein, M., & Kliman, G. (Eds.). (1965). *Children and the death of a president: Multi-disciplinary studies*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Copyright of Death Studies is the property of Taylor & Francis Ltd and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.