Finally, as a consequence of these processes, attitudes become more extreme after exposure to inconclusive or mixed evidence.

B. Hostile Media Bias

People don’t always see support for their position. Sometimes people with strongly held attitudes believe the evidence is stacked against them. Examples of this tendency can be found in the letters to the editor section of almost every newspaper. Disgruntled conservatives rail against an obvious liberal bias, while annoyed liberals grumble that the coverage is slanted toward a conservative point of view.

Vallone, Ross, and Lepper (1985) conducted a laboratory experiment to investigate the roots of people’s perception of media bias. They first identified three groups of students: students with pro-Israel attitudes, students with pro-Arab attitudes, and students with neutral attitudes toward Israel and the Arab nations. Next, they had participants view actual televised accounts of a 1982 incident in the Mideast known as the Beirut massacre, in which a large number of civilians living in refugee camps in Lebanon were killed. Afterward, they indicated whether they thought the television accounts they had viewed were fair or were biased against Israel.

Figure 6.5 shows some of the results from this investigation. It is apparent that students’ attitudes strongly shaped their perceptions of media fairness. In comparison with the neutral attitude control group, students with pro-Israel attitudes believed the program was unduly biased against Israel, while students with pro-Arab attitudes believed that the program was heavily slanted toward Israel (see also Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994).

C. Minimizing Biased Assimilation Effects

The prevalence and importance of the effects we have been discussing have led researchers to look for ways to minimize people’s biases. Lord, Lepper, and Preston (1984) considered two possible antidotes. One possibility is to simply instruct people to be fair and impartial in their judgments. This view assumes that biased assimilation