

# The Impact of Acculturation and Religious Identification on Perceived Discrimination for Arab/Middle Eastern Americans

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The aim of the current study was to determine the impact of acculturation, ethnic identity, and religious affiliation on perceived discrimination for persons of Arab and Middle Eastern descent. Two aspects of acculturation (ethnic society immersion and dominant society immersion), religious affiliation, and ethnic identity were measured using a final sample of 177 individuals of Arab or Middle Eastern descent. Results indicated that Arab/Middle Eastern Americans who reported lower levels of dominant society immersion tended to report higher levels of discrimination. Furthermore, Muslims reported a higher level of discrimination than Christians but this finding was moderated by level of acculturation. Specifically, Muslims who reported a high level of dominant society immersion experienced the most discrimination, whereas Christians who reported a high level of dominant society immersion reported less discrimination. Study implications are discussed.

*Keywords:* Arab Americans, perceived discrimination, Muslims, Christians, acculturation, ethnic identity

Although discrimination toward Arabs and individuals of Middle Eastern descent in the United States was reported as early as the 1900s (Naber, 2000), the events of September 11th, 2001, led to a sharp increase in prejudice and discrimination toward persons of Arab and Middle Eastern descent (Ajrouch, 2005; Ibish, 2003). Instances of prejudice and discrimination toward other minority groups in the United States have been well documented throughout U.S. history (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986; Jones, 1997; Nelson, 2002). Because of the fact that Arabs and individuals of Middle Eastern descent are not recognized by the U.S. government as a minority group, many instances of discrimination fail to get recorded. As a result, current discrimination statistics provide a conservative estimate (Ibish, 2001). The lack of recognition as a minority group by the U.S. government has led to scant if any data gathering about the Arab/Middle Eastern Americans and their experiences.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, very little is known about this cultural group. Although previous studies have found a link between instances of discrimination and psychological variables such as psychological distress (Moradi & Hasan, 2004), very little is known about the role that acculturation and ethnic identity play in Arab Americans' perception of discrimination. Furthermore, in many previously published studies Arab Americans are often talked about monolithically or their religious classification is overlooked or assumed to be Muslim. The role of acculturation and ethnic identity in discrimination of both Christian and Muslim Arab Americans is examined in the current study.

According to the Arab American Institute (AAI), the population of Arab Americans is estimated to be around three million (Samhan, 2006). The term Arab American is both a cultural and linguistic term (Samhan, 2006). Some posit that Arab Americans are those who speak Arabic and participate in Arabic culture (Al-Hazza & Lucking, 2005; Suleiman, 2000). Others have argued that the linguistic definition of Arab American is too narrow and excludes those individuals who do not exclusively speak Arabic or speak the language at all. The most inclusive definition is offered by AAI and defines Arab Americans as those who have ancestry in any of the 22 Arab countries. The majority of Arab Americans trace their ancestry to Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Palestine, and Iraq. Other Arab countries include Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen (AAI, n.d.; Erickson & Al-Timimi, 2001; Moradi & Hasan, 2004).

Arab American immigration has occurred in three major waves. The first wave of immigrants arrived in the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s and consisted mainly of Christian laborers, farmers, and merchants from Lebanon and Syria who immigrated to better their economic situations (Erickson & Al-Timimi, 2001; Haboush, 2007; Nasser-McMillian & Hakim-Larson, 2003). The second wave of immigration occurred after World War II after the state of Israel was established in 1948. This wave consisted of more Muslims, and/or others who were displaced as a result of the creation of the state of Israel. The most

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<sup>1</sup> The term Arab/Middle Eastern American will be used to refer to persons who have ancestry in any of the Arab countries in the Middle East. Because of sociopolitical reasons, some individuals do not adopt the Arab label even if their ancestry is in one of the Arab countries. Any deviation from the Arab/Middle Eastern American label in the current study reflects the individual author(s)' usage in the study being reviewed.

recent and third wave of immigration brought more Muslims, highly educated professionals, and individuals who wanted to escape war and political instability in their countries (Abraham, 1995; Naff, 1985).

Although Arab Americans are a diverse group with a tremendous amount of within-group variability (e.g., based on SES, level of acculturation, educational level, religion, country of origin, etc.), there are some common cultural characteristics that are shared by many Arab American groups. First and foremost, family plays a central role in the life of an Arab American (Abudabbeh, 1996; Haboush, 2007). Family obligations are often given priority, and there is a high level of family interdependence. Similar to other collectivist cultures, parents are highly involved in their children's lives and remain so for most of their lives. In more traditional Arab American families, children do not leave the home until they are married (Haboush, 2007). Until then, they remain the parents' responsibility. In addition, the concept of family does not only include nuclear family but also extended family. Individuals are also expected to put the goals of the family above their individual goals or success. In addition to the central role of family, respect for elders is expected and enforced. Other commonly shared cultural values for Arab Americans include the significant role of religion and the immigration experience (e.g., language acquisition, finding a job, raising "American" children; Abudabbeh, 1996; Moradi & Hasan, 2004).

In terms of religion, the majority of Arab Americans are Christian and comprise approximately 77% of the Arab American population. Specifically, 42% are Catholic (e.g., Syrian Catholic, Maronite, Greek Catholic), 23% are Orthodox (e.g., Coptic and Syrian Orthodox), and 12% are Protestant (Samhan, 2006). Since the 1950s, Arab Muslims have been the fastest-growing segment of Arab Americans and make up approximately 23% of the Arab American population (Samhan, 2006). Compared with Arab American Christians, Muslims espouse more traditions that appear to conflict with mainstream American culture. Furthermore, gender integration is not common in Islam. Because there may be overt markers of religion for Muslims (e.g., beards for men, *hijab* for women, prayers five times a day), oftentimes they are a visible religious minority and vulnerable to discrimination and bigotry. There are some similarities between Arab Orthodox Christians and Muslims in that they both emphasize modesty, disapprove of American standards of dating, and fast for religious reasons (e.g., Ramadan for Muslims and Christmas and Easter fasts for Orthodox Christians). Although there have been some hypotheses posited about the ease of acculturation for Muslims and Christians, few published studies are available that empirically test this assertion. The retention of traditional Arab values varies among Arab Americans and depends in large part on level of acculturation.

### Acculturation and Ethnic Identity

Acculturation has been conceptualized in myriad ways. Early research tended to conceptualize acculturation as a unidimensional concept where immigrants acculturate to dominant society (Stephenson, 2000). More recent characterizations involve a bidirectional and multidimensional approach. Arguably, the most cited and widely accepted conceptualization of acculturation was put forth by John Berry. He defined acculturation as a multifaceted process of change that occurs when at least two

cultures come into sustained contact with one another (Berry, 1980, 1992, 1996, 2003). Levels of acculturation can manifest itself in two fundamental ways, immersion in or adoption of the dominant society and retention or immersion in the ethnic society. According to Berry, these two fundamental issues can result in four different acculturation positions or statuses. One may be assimilated, where there is less immersion in the ethnic society and full immersion in the dominant society. Integration occurs when an individual is fully immersed in both dominant and ethnic society. Separation is characterized by complete immersion into the ethnic society and retraction from the dominant society. Marginalization is defined as lack of immersion in both dominant and ethnic societies. All of these different positions or statuses posited by Berry depend on level of immersion in both ethnic and dominant society. Therefore, the elements of acculturation that will be examined in the current study are dominant society immersion and ethnic society immersion. Dominant society immersion refers to the extent to which individuals adopt or adhere to dominant society values, beliefs, and behaviors whereas ethnic society immersion refers to the extent to which individuals hold on to or adopt beliefs, values, and behaviors believed to be a part of their ethnic heritage.

Although the role of acculturation has been posited as important in understanding Arab Americans (e.g., Erickson & Al-Timimi, 2001; Nasser-McMillian & Hakim-Larson, 2003), there have been relatively few studies that actually measure aspects of acculturation. One of the earliest studies that measured acculturation was conducted by Faragallah, Schumm, and Webb (1997) where 39 Arab Americans were asked questions pertaining to their life satisfaction and experiences in the United States. Results indicated that greater acculturation to mainstream society was associated with higher levels of life satisfaction. In terms of religion, Arab Christians reported higher levels of acculturation than did Arab Muslims. Furthermore, individuals who immigrated to the United States at a young age, and resided in the United States for longer periods than others, were more likely to report higher levels of acculturation. Level of perceived discrimination was not significantly related to acculturation in the aforementioned sample. It is not clear whether there is a true lack of relationship between acculturation and perceived discrimination or whether lack of significance is a result of low statistical power resulting in a Type II error. It is possible that acculturation did not relate to perceived discrimination prior to 9/11, but the reason for lack of significance is not clear.

More recently, Henry, Biran, and Stiles (2006) and reported a preliminary development of a scale to measure perceived parental acculturation. In this study, 44 participants completed a 16-item scale designed to measure two aspects of acculturation, perceived parental openness and perceived parental preservation. The scale assessed the ways in which parents interact with their native culture and American culture. The authors found that the mean endorsement for parental openness and parental preservation were 2.16 and 2.24, respectively, indicating an average response of "occasionally" for both subscales. Very little information was provided about the actual acculturation and enculturation levels of the individuals in this study. Furthermore, the low sample size precludes any meaningful statistical analyses for the study. The study is exploratory and only provides a superficial account of acculturation for a small group of Arab Americans.

A more recent study assessing acculturation was conducted with a sample of Arab Muslim youth (Britto & Amer, 2007). The study examined the relationship between family functioning and acculturation. In terms of acculturation, three different groups emerged: individuals who are highly bicultural, those who are moderately bicultural, and those who hold a high level of Arab cultural values. Results indicated that individuals in the moderately bicultural group reported higher levels of family acculturative stress and less family support than individuals in the other acculturation groups. Overall, all three acculturation groups reported positive family functioning. The authors reiterated the importance of understanding the intersection of Muslim and Arab identities and how this may impact acculturation issues. In addition, Amer and Hovey (2007) found differences in acculturation and depression based on religious identification in a sample of second generation Arab Americans. Specifically, they found that Christians were more likely to report higher levels of assimilation and integration than Muslims as measured by the Arab Acculturation Scale (AAS), and Muslims reported a higher level of separation than their Christian counterparts. There were no differences in family functioning, depression, or acculturative stress for Muslims and Christians. The current study will assess two aspects of acculturation (ethnic and dominant society immersion) and their relationship to other psychological variables (ethnic identity and perceived discrimination).

Compared with acculturation, ethnic identity tends to be more stable over the course of a person's lifetime (Phinney, 2003). Ethnic identity is an aspect of acculturation that focuses on one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group. It includes feelings and attitudes a person has toward their ethnic group (Phinney, 2003; Tajfel, 1981). According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), people tend to identify with a group that they perceive to hold similar characteristics and experiences to themselves. Unfortunately one common characteristic for most Arab Americans is the experience of prejudice and discrimination. According to the rejection-identification model presented by Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey (1999), experiences of discrimination can stimulate an increase in in-group identification among ethnic minority groups. Because individuals strive to protect their self-esteem and well-being, they may seek out others with whom they perceive to be similar to increase the feeling of connectedness and belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). As a result, ethnic identity may serve as a protective strategy for ethnic minorities who perceive discrimination and may help offset some of the negative psychological costs to discrimination (e.g., loss of self-esteem, well-being, etc.; Lee, Noh, Yoo, & Doh, 2007). To date, there have been few quantitative studies performed that assess the ethnic identity of Arab Americans/Middle Easterners in the United States. In a qualitative study with 10 Arab American youth (mostly of Lebanese descent), Ajrouch (2004) investigated the mechanisms underlying ethnic identity formation. Participants differentiated themselves from recent immigrants and the larger "white" society. Furthermore, Ajrouch found that beliefs related to what is considered appropriate behavior for Arab Americans is gendered, where girls tend to have more restrictions placed upon them. In addition to gender, Eid (2003) found differences in ethnic identity based on religiosity and religious status in a sample of Canadian Arabs. Specifically, he found that Canadian Christians are more likely to have their ethnic identity tied to religion than their Canadian Muslim counterparts.

One quantitative study that has been conducted focused on the development of an ethnic identity scale designed for Arab American males (Barry, 2001, 2005; Barry, Elliott, & Evans, 2000). Given the relatively low sample size of the construction and validation samples of the Male Arabic Ethnic Identity Measure (MAEIM) and the focus on males, the current study set out to determine the extent ethnic identity influences perceived discrimination for Arab Americans with a widely used and established ethnic identity measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992).

### Prejudice and Discrimination Toward Arab Americans

Discrimination toward Arab Americans was documented as early as 1914 in the United States (Naber, 2000). From 1998 to 2000, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) reported "the continuing problem of physical and psychological attacks on Americans of Arab heritage, many of which constitute hate crimes under the law" (Ibish, 2001, p. 8). The report stated that Arab Americans remain vulnerable to attacks motivated by prejudice toward Arabs. In the first nine weeks following 9/11 the ADC reported over 700 violent incidents targeting Arabs, Arab Americans, Muslims, and those perceived to be Arab or Muslim (Ibish, 2003). Over 800 incidents of workplace discrimination took place between September 11, 2001, and October 11, 2002 (Ibish, 2003). During this time approximately 80 Arab American and/or Muslim passengers were illegally removed from airplanes. In addition, an increase in institutional discrimination occurred as evidenced by FBI and INS misconduct, which included instances of racial profiling and stereotyping, indefinite detention of foreign nationals, and suspension of U.S. citizens' constitutional rights without due process (Ibish, 2003).

In Zogby's (2002) poll of 505 Arab Americans, one in three individuals reported that they have experienced discrimination. In addition, "40% of those surveyed know someone who was discriminated against since 9/11" (p. 2). Approximately 66% expressed concern about the "long term effects of discrimination," and 78% reported feeling that "there has been more profiling of Arab Americans since September 11" (Zogby, 2002, p. 2).

Although there have been studies conducted that either directly or indirectly assessed the role of discrimination for Muslims that may have a small sub sample of Arabs/Middle Eastern Americans (e.g., Ali, Milstein, & Marzuk, 2005; Rippey & Newman, 2006, 2008), Moradi and Hasan (2004) conducted one of the first psychological studies assessing perceived discrimination for Arab Americans with a sample of 108 individuals. According to their study, 53% of the sample reported being treated unfairly by strangers as a result of their Arab descent, 46% reported being called racist names, 47% reported being in an argument about something racist done to them, and 70% wanted to tell someone off for being racist (Moradi & Hasan, 2004). Moradi and Hasan (2004) examined the link between perceived discrimination, self-esteem, and psychological distress as well as the mediating effects of personal control. Their results indicated that personal control mediated the relationship between discrimination and self esteem and partially mediated the link between discrimination and psychological distress. Aside from the aforementioned study, the author could not locate any other study that examined the relationship between psychological variables and perceived discrimination for Arab Americans.

Among the few studies that include statistics about the discrimination of Arab Americans, many fail to report differences in discrimination by religion (e.g., Muslims and Christians). Furthermore, there is a dearth of studies that actually assess the role of psychological variables in the perceived discrimination of Arab Americans. For example, it is not clear to what extent level of acculturation and ethnic identity predict perceived discrimination. Given the paucity of psychological studies on Arab Americans, the current study will examine the role of acculturation, ethnic identity, and religious identification on the perceived discrimination of Arab Americans. Specific research questions include: (a) To what extent do aspects of acculturation (ethnic society immersion and dominant society immersion) and ethnic identity predict perceived discrimination for Arab Americans? (b) To what extent does religious affiliation (Christian vs. Muslim) predict perceived discrimination for Arab Americans? (c) Does acculturation moderate the relationship between religious identity and perceived discrimination?

## Method

### Participants

One hundred eighty-three individuals of Arab or Middle Eastern descent participated in the current study. Six individuals who were not of Arab or Middle Eastern descent were dropped from the analysis yielding a final sample size of 177 participants (61 males, 114 females, 2 did not respond).<sup>2</sup> Participant ages ranged from 14 to 65, with a mean age of 29 years ( $SD = 10.5$  years). Participants resided in several states including Ohio, Wisconsin, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, New York, New Jersey, Washington, DC, Texas, and Michigan. The majority of participants in the sample reported that they were not currently students (53%) whereas 45% reported being currently enrolled in some form of school (e.g., high school, college, graduate school, professional schools). In terms of religious affiliation, 45% indicated that they were Christian, and 42% reported being Muslim, 10% did not respond, and 3% reported other religions. Reported countries of ancestry were diverse including, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, and the United Arab Emirates. Individuals of Egyptian ancestry represented the largest group in the sample (36%) followed by Palestine (17%), Iraq (7%), and Saudi Arabia (5%). The majority of the sample reported being an American citizen (72%), 9% indicated permanent resident status, 5% indicated being on a student visa, 2% reported that they were currently visiting, and 12% failed to respond to the question. In terms of generational status, the majority of participants (52%) reported being first generation (born in a country outside the United States), 33% identified as second generation (born in the United States, parents born in a different country), three percent reported being third generation (both you and your parents were born in the United States; grandparents born in a different country), 12% of respondents failed to respond to the question. Length of residence in the United States ranged from 1 year to 44 years ( $M = 18.9$  years,  $SD = 9.8$  years) The majority of participants (42%) reported their socioeconomic status to be middle class, 34% reported upper-middle class, 12% identified as working class, and 9% reported upper class, and 3% failed to respond to this question.

### Procedure

Because of the current political climate in the United States, data collection with individuals of Middle Eastern and Arab descent is quite difficult. There is often mistrust of any individual who attempts to collect information on Arabs because of the fear that it may lead to governmental or legal intervention. Many times, access to these individuals is only available to those who have close personal connections to the Arab community. Several methods of data collection were employed in the current study. Paper and Internet surveys were distributed via snowball sampling. The e-mail version of the survey was sent to several professional listservs centered on Arab American issues. Through the personal contacts of the author, paper surveys were distributed to acquaintances in Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. In addition, e-mails were sent to several personal contacts and asked to be passed on to other individuals of Arab or Middle Eastern descent. Participants were given the choice of completing an e-mail or paper version of the survey. Individuals were told that they had to be of Arab or Middle-Eastern descent and reside in the United States to participate. Participants read an informed consent and were told that the survey took approximately 15 to 35 min to complete.

### Instruments

**Stephenson Multigroup Acculturation Scale (SMAS).** Stephenson (2000) created this scale to assess two aspects of acculturation, ethnic society immersion and dominant society immersion. Items were measured on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *false* to (4) *true*. Sample items include, "I like to listen to music of my ethnic group" (ethnic society immersion), and "I have many (Anglo) American acquaintances" (dominant society immersion). Internal consistency reliability for both subscale have ranged from .86 to .97 in previous studies (Stephenson, 2000). The SMAS has demonstrated convergent validity with the generational status in previous studies (Stephenson, 2000). Internal consistency estimates were .84 for Dominant Society Immersion and .78 for Ethnic Society Immersion (see Table 1).

**Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire (PEDQ).** This measure by Contrada and colleagues (2001) was designed to measure perceived discrimination using 22 items measured on a 7-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*very often*). Sample items include "How often have others avoided social contact with you because of your ethnicity?" and "How often has it been implied or suggested that because of your ethnicity you must be violent or dangerous?" Higher scores on the scale indicate higher levels of perceived discrimination. Cronbach's alpha was ranged from .87 to .88 in previous studies (Brondolo et al., 2005). The internal consistency estimate for the PEDQ was .96 in the current study.

**Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM).** Phinney (1992) developed this 12-item scale to assess two aspects of ethnic identity: ethnic identity search and affirmation. Items include statements such as "I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to" and "I have spent time trying to find out more about

<sup>2</sup> "Did not respond" refers to individuals who did not answer that particular question.

Table 1  
Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations Among Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	—						
2. Age	-.32**	—					
3. Religion	-.03	-.05	—				
4. Perceived discrimination	.11	-.20*	.34**	.96			
5. Ethnic society immersion	-.17	.09	.24**	.18*	.78		
6. Dominant society immersion	-.00	.12	-.42**	-.27**	-.07	.84	
7. Ethnic Identity	.07	-.17†	-.08	.18*	.31**	.15†	.88

Note. Internal consistency values are italicized in the diagonal. For Gender, 1 = male and 2 = female. For Religion, Christian = 1, Muslim = 2.

†  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs” that are measured on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). The MEIM is keyed in the positive direction where higher scores indicate a higher level of identity search or affirmation. In previous studies, internal consistency reliability estimates ranged from .70 to .90 (Cokley, 2005; Cokley & Moore, 2007; Phinney, 1992) and was found to be .88 in the current study. Construct validity for the MEIM has been demonstrated via correlations with other identity measures such as racial identity (Cokley, 2005).

**Demographics questionnaire.** Participants were asked to indicate their sex, religion, race, nationality, ancestry, class status, socioeconomic status (SES), generational status, citizenship status, number of years in the United States, and age. SES was measured on a scale ranging from (1) *working class* to (4) *upper class*.

## Results

Correlations among pertinent study variables are displayed in Table 1. In terms of demographic variables, younger individuals reported experiencing more discrimination ( $r = -.20$ ) than older participants. Religious affiliation was strongly related to both elements of acculturation (dominant society and ethnic society immersion) as well as perceived discrimination (see Table 1). Specifically, Muslims reported experiencing more discrimination than Christians. Muslims also reported a higher degree of ethnic society immersion and less dominant society immersion than Christians. Muslims were also more likely to report a higher level of ethnic identity affirmation and belonging than Christians.

Table 2 provides a summary of the hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting perceived discrimination. The first step consisting of sex, age, and religion accounted for significant variance in participant's perceived discrimination,  $F(3, 114) = 6.88, p < .001; R^2 = .15$  (adjusted  $R^2 = .13$ ). Religion accounted for most of the variance  $sr^2 = .11$  in step one, whereas sex and age did not significantly predict perceived discrimination. Specifically, Muslims perceived more discrimination than did Christians in the sample.

After accounting for demographic factors, ethnic society immersion, dominant society immersion and ethnic identity were entered in step two. This step emerged as significant,  $F(6, 111) = 4.99, p < .05; R^2 = .06$ . Specifically, ethnic identity accounted for most of the variance  $sr^2 = .04$  and dominant society immersion accounted for less variance,  $sr^2 = .02$ . Individuals higher in ethnic

identity attitudes were more likely to report discrimination. Furthermore, dominant society immersion approached significance in the model suggesting that those who are more acculturated to American society are less likely to report instances of discrimination. The entire regression model, consisting of sex, age, religion, ethnic society immersion, dominant society immersion, and ethnic identity accounted for 21% of the variance in perceived discrimination.

To test whether dominant society immersion and ethnic identity were moderated by religious status to impact perceived discrimination two separate analysis of variances (ANOVAs) were performed. These two variables emerged as significant in the regression and therefore were subjected to further tests. For the first interaction test, dominant society immersion and religion, a 2 (Acculturation: Low vs. High)  $\times$  2 (Religion: Christian vs. Muslim) ANOVA was performed. Dominant society immersion was dichotomized into low and high acculturation using a median split. Because the cell sizes were fairly equal, the ANOVA was robust to violations of the homogeneity of variance assumption. The 2  $\times$  2 ANOVA resulted in a significant main effect for religion  $F(1, 123) = 13.77, p < .001$ , and a significant interaction effect,  $F(1, 123) = 4.29, p < .05$ . Dominant society immersion did not emerge as a significant main effect,  $F(1, 123) = .106, p > .05$ . Not surprisingly, results indicated that Muslims ( $M = 57.72, SD =$

Table 2  
Hierarchical Regression Results (Change in  $R^2$ , Standardized Beta, and Semi-partial Square [ $Sr^2$ ]) for Perceived Discrimination

Variable entered on step	Perceived discrimination		
	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$sr^2$
I. Demographics	.15		
Age		-.10	.01
Gender		.11	.01
Religion		.34**	.11
II. Cultural measures	.06		
Ethnic society immersion		-.00	.00
Dominant society immersion		-.18†	.02
Ethnic identity		.22*	.04

Note. Gender is coded as 1 = male, 2 = female. Religion is coded as 1 = Christian, 2 = Muslim.

†  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

27.98) were more likely to report discrimination than Christians ( $M = 40.48$ ,  $SD = 18.84$ ). Figure 1 portrays the results of the interaction. Results of the interaction revealed no statistically significant difference in perceived discrimination between Christians ( $M = 47.80$ ,  $SD = 21.89$ ) and Muslims ( $M = 55.18$ ,  $SD = 24.12$ ) who are low in dominant society immersion, but there was a significant difference between Muslims and Christians in the high dominant society immersion condition. Specifically, Muslims who were more acculturated to dominant society perceived the most discrimination ( $M = 63.05$ ,  $SD = 34.77$ ), whereas Christians who were highly acculturated to dominant society reported the least amount of discrimination ( $M = 37.00$ ,  $SD = 16.36$ ). Another 2 (Ethnic Identity: Low vs. High)  $\times$  2 (Religion: Christian vs. Muslim) ANOVA was performed to determine whether there was an interaction between ethnic identity and religious status. Results indicated a statistically insignificant effect for the interaction,  $F(1, 115) = .039$ ,  $p > .05$  and the ethnic identity main effect,  $F(1, 115) = .173$ ,  $p > .05$ . The main effect of religion mirrored previous analyses and emerged as significant,  $F(1, 115) = 17.07$ ,  $p < .05$  where Muslims perceived more discrimination than Christians.

### Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to assess the impact of acculturation, ethnic identity, and religious affiliation on the perceived discrimination of Arab American/Middle Eastern Americans. Overall, study findings indicate a continued problem of discrimination for Arab American/Middle Eastern Americans. Approximately 52% of the study sample reported that it has been implied that they were dangerous or violent as a result of their ethnicity. An astonishing 77% reported being subjected to offensive comments about their ethnic group. Instances of perceived discrimination in the current study appear to replicate findings of Arab American discrimination in other studies (e.g., Ibish, 2003; Moradi & Hasan, 2004).

In the prediction model, religious identification emerged as the strongest predictor of perceived discrimination for this sample. Specifically, Muslims reported higher levels of discrimination than Christians overall. A closer examination of the data revealed an interaction between religious identification and dominant society immersion (see Figure 1). Specifically, there was not a significant difference in perceived discrimination for Muslims and Christians in the low dominant society condition. However, there was a significant difference in perceived discrimination between Mus-

lims and Christians in the high dominant society immersion condition. Therefore, Arab Americans/Middle Eastern Americans who are less acculturated to dominant society tend to experience similar levels of discrimination. However, higher levels of dominant society immersion has different consequences for Muslims and Christians. Christians who are high in dominant society immersion report the least amount of discrimination whereas Muslims high in dominant society immersion report the highest amount of discrimination across all four conditions. Therefore, the positive aspects of acculturation (e.g., successful adaptation to a new environment) do not seem to buffer Muslim Arab Americans against discrimination.

Several explanations may account for the significant interaction. First, because Christianity is the dominant religion practiced in the United States, Arab American/Middle Eastern Christians may have an easier time with acculturation aspects related to religious identity. For example, religious holidays for the majority of Arab Christians tend to closely align with the general Christian population in the United States. Muslim holidays tend to be less recognized by society in general and as a result may be minimized by the Christian majority. Muslims may experience a greater level of workplace discrimination not only in terms of different religious holidays but also as a result of religious practices (e.g., prayers 5 times a day) that diverge from the majority of Christians. Second, in addition to religious practices Muslims tend to be a physically visible religious minority. Muslims who wear a *hijab* or have beards are often targets of ethnic and religious discrimination (Ibish, 2003). Third, because of the current political climate in the United States, it is not surprising that Muslims are experiencing an elevated level of discrimination. In early 2008, the televangelist Rod Parsley "called upon Christians to wage a "war" against the "false religion" of Islam with the aim of destroying it" (Corn, 2008).

Fourth, Muslims and Christians who have low levels of ethnic society immersion and/or recently immigrated to the United States may expect to be discriminated against based on their perceived status as foreigners as opposed to other identity statuses (e.g., religion, race, etc.). They may not pick up on prejudice because of their religious status and the discrimination they perceive may be attributed to their recent immigrant status (e.g., speaking with an accent, wearing ethnic clothing, not adhering to American customs). Therefore, Christians and Muslims who have low levels of dominant society immersion may be similar in that they interpret discrimination they experience as a result of their "foreigner" status rather than their religion. Muslims who are highly immersed

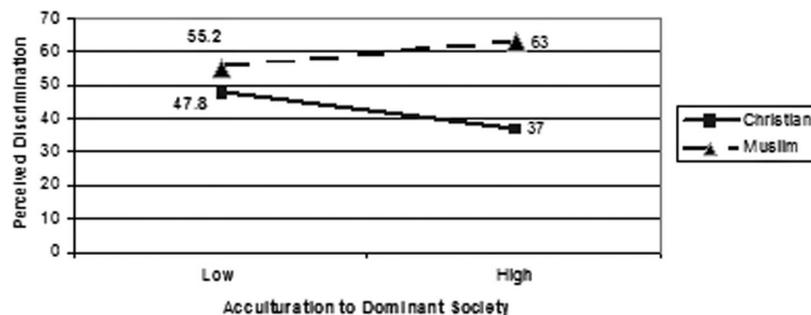


Figure 1. Acculturation  $\times$  religion interaction.

in the dominant society may have internalized the American ideal of “freedom of religion” and as result hold the expectation that they should not be discriminated against because they have an established “American” status. They may perceive discrimination based on religion more frequently than their low dominant society counterparts because they may be more aware and familiar with the mechanisms of prejudice and discrimination in the United States.

In addition, to religious identification, ethnic identity emerged as the second strongest predictor of perceived discrimination for Arab Americans/Middle Eastern Americans. Results indicated that individuals with a higher ethnic identity reported more discrimination than individuals reporting a lower level of ethnic identity. The direction of this relationship remains unclear. According to the rejection-identification model presented by Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey (1999), experiences of discrimination can increase in-group identification among ethnic minority groups. The rejection-identification model posits that discrimination happens first and as a result members of the discriminated group increase their identification with their social group. Another possibility is that individuals who are higher in ethnic identity may outwardly “display” or advertise their group membership and as a result discrimination by out-group members occurs. The relationship between ethnic identity and perceived discrimination is most likely bidirectional where individual Arabs/Middle Eastern Americans who are discriminated against increase their in-group identification. This increase in identification may manifest itself in more outward expressions of ethnicity (e.g., ethnic clothing, speaking Arabic in public) and as a result prejudiced individuals may be prompted to discriminate after exposure to such stimuli.

Ethnic identity for Arab/Middle Eastern Americans continues to be a convoluted issue in the United States. Because there are many different ethnic groups that fall within the Arab/Middle Eastern category (e.g., Egyptian, Palestinian, Jordanian, Lebanese, Syrian, Moroccan) that may have their own unique customs, norms, beliefs, and values it is often difficult to find common cultural characteristics that can be applied to all ethnic groups within this designation. The issue of homogenization is quite common with pan-ethnic designations and has been noted in both Hispanic and Asian subgroups in the United States. Umana-Taylor and Fine (2001) cite the methodological shortcomings of grouping Latino adolescents into one monolithic, homogenous group. They caution that doing so may obscure important differences between ethnic groups. This issue is further complicated for Arab/Middle Eastern Americans by the lack of recognition as a minority group by the United States government. Because Arab/Middle Eastern Americans are not considered an official minority group, there is an underestimation of the actual number of these individuals in the United States. Furthermore, important statistics pertaining to this group in several sectors of society (e.g., health care institutions, education, and workplace) fail to get recorded and as a result little is known about their functioning. As a result, comparisons between different ethnic groups within this pan-ethnic designation become extremely difficult or impossible.

Like other minority groups, salience of identity is widely variable among Arab/Middle Eastern Americans. There may be some individuals who strongly identify with their ethnic group and others who would rather be identified solely as American or downplay the role of ethnic identity in their lives. As noted by

several scholars, ethnic and racial identity development is conceptualized as a process where individuals may move from a low-level identity salience and progress toward incorporating ethnicity and race into their self-concept to a larger degree (Cross, 1991; Phinney, 1996). For Arab/Middle Eastern Americans the events of September 11, 2001, may have functioned as an encounter stage where their ethnic and possibly racial identity became more salient. Before 9/11, some individuals in this group may have never thought of themselves as part of an ethnic or racial group. This is further complicated by the fact that according to the Census, individuals in this group are classified as White. Therefore, they were being treated as a minority group (e.g., through discrimination) but were not protected by the United States government.

There were several limitations in the current study. In the present study, the SMAS was used to assess acculturation. This scale was designed to be used with different ethnic groups as a general acculturation measure. Some scholars have argued that acculturation should be measured using scales specifically designed for a particular ethnic group (e.g., Cuellar, Harris, & Jasso, 1980). Studies examining acculturation for Arab/Middle Eastern Americans are in their infancy and as a result very little information is available. Acculturation scales measuring specific aspects of culture pertinent to this group need to be developed and validated.

Furthermore, future studies with Arab/Middle Eastern Americans should also provide an Arabic version of the study measures that have been tested for construct equivalence. One of the requirements for participation in the current study was fluency in English, which may have excluded individuals who could read and write English but did not feel that they were fluent. This requirement may have biased the sample in favor of those who are more acculturated in terms of English language use. Future studies should not make language a requirement for participation. In addition, a more diverse sample of Arab/Middle Eastern Americans who have ancestry in a variety of Middle Eastern countries should be included in future samples. The numbers of Lebanese and Syrian participants were underrepresented in the current study but remain two of the largest groups of Arab Americans in the United States. Future studies should attempt to mirror actual population proportions in the United States.

In spite of these limitations, the present study offers insight into the role of acculturation, ethnic identity, and religious affiliation on the perceived discrimination of Arab/Middle Eastern Americans. There is a dearth of studies that examine psychological constructs with Arab/Middle Eastern Americans and more studies need to be conducted to help elucidate some of the issues with this understudied U.S. ethnic group. This study contributes to literature by revealing some of the differences between Christian and Muslim Arab/Middle Eastern Americans. Scholars must avoid homogenizing this diverse pan-ethnic group. Attending to their perceived discrimination will not only help improve mental health services for Arab/Middle Eastern Americans but will also reveal some of their experiences as a minority group in American society.

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### **Call for Nominations: *Psychology of Men and Masculinity***

The Publications and Communications (P&C) Board of the American Psychological Association has opened nominations for the editorship of *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*. The editorial search is co-chaired by Glenn Good, PhD and Lillian Comas-Diaz, PhD.

*Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, official journal of APA Division 51 (Society for the Psychological Study of Men and Masculinity), is devoted to the dissemination of research, theory, and clinical scholarship that advances the psychology of men and masculinity. This discipline is defined broadly as the study of how boys' and men's psychology is influenced and shaped by both sex and gender, and encompasses both the study of biological sex differences and similarities as well as of the social construction of gender.

Editorial candidates should be available to start receiving manuscripts in January 2011 to prepare for issues published in 2012. Please note that the P&C Board encourages participation by members of underrepresented groups in the publication process and would particularly welcome such nominees. Self-nominations are also encouraged.

Candidates should be nominated by accessing APA's EditorQuest site on the Web. Using your Web browser, go to <http://editorquest.apa.org>. On the Home menu on the left, find "Guests." Next, click on the link "Submit a Nomination," enter your nominee's information, and click "Submit."

Prepared statements of one page or less in support of a nominee can also be submitted by e-mail to Molly Douglas-Fujimoto, Managing Director, Educational Publishing Foundation, at [mdouglas-fujimoto@apa.org](mailto:mdouglas-fujimoto@apa.org).

The deadline for accepting nominations is January 31, 2010, when reviews will begin.