

# Acculturation, Acculturative Stress, Religiosity and Psychological Adjustment among Muslim Arab American Adolescents

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## Abstract

Whether born in the United States or being immigrants, Arab American youth may experience challenges related to maintaining their heritage culture's traditions and values and the degree to which they participate in mainstream American tra-

ditions. The goals of this research study were to see how acculturation, acculturative stress, and religiosity were associated with psychological adjustment among Muslim Arab American adolescents. One hundred twenty-eight Arab American adolescents (ages 11–21) completed measures of demographic characteristics, acculturation, acculturative stress, religiosity, and social desirability. Age, gender, religiosity, and length of time in the U.S. were found to significantly predict heritage cultural orientation but not mainstream cultural orientation. Moreover, acculturation and acculturative stress significantly predicted psychological problems but not overall competence. The implications of the study address how practitioners may consider religion, acculturation, and related stressors when working with Muslim Arab American adolescents.

*Keywords:* acculturation, acculturative stress, psychological adjustment, Arab American

There are over three million Arab Americans in the United States (Arab American Institute, 2002), yet this ethnic minority group is seldom examined in psychological research. Americans of Arab descent are an ethnically and religiously diverse group and trace their roots to countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Most Arab Americans are highly educated and reside predominantly in metropolitan areas. There is also diversity of religious beliefs among Arab Americans, with a majority being Christian (63%) followed by Muslim (25%; Arab American Institute, 2002)

Like other immigrants, Muslim Arab Americans have experienced challenges related to acculturation, adjustment, and prejudice. The sociopolitical events in the past twenty years as well as the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> have led to increased negative perceptions and acts of discrimination toward the Arab American community (Cainkar, 2004; Haddad, 2004). In a report by the Council of American-Islamic Relations (2006), 135 cases of hate crimes occurred in 2007. Additionally, approximately one in four Americans believe that Islam is associated with hatred and violence (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2006). These underlying attitudes and hate crimes toward Muslims likely have an impact on Muslim youth and communities.

For Arab American youth, the issues of acculturation and prejudice become more complicated as they develop into adolescents. Not only are they developing independence, a clearer sense of their personal identity, and closer friendships (Erikson, 1968), but they are also negotiating multiple cultures and forging identities reflecting their Arab and mainstream culture (Abu-Laban & Abu-Laban, 1999). During this critical stage of identity development, they are beginning to understand themselves as a member of an ethnic group (Phinney, 1989). This negotiation of culture and identity becomes increasingly complex when understood in the context of the current social-political climate in the United States. Not only are they beginning to recognize themselves as

Arab American and/or Muslim, but also they are recognizing what being Arab American represents in mainstream society.

Indeed, Muslim youth experience a number of stressors that may affect their overall wellbeing. In one study, Muslim American adolescents from varied ethnic backgrounds were interviewed and surveyed about the challenges of being Muslim American, their gendered identities, and difficulties in the home and their communities (Ajrouch, 2004). Many of the young Muslim Americans experienced daily discrimination both in school and in their communities. Moreover, there were differences in experiences of Arab American girls and boys, with girls experiencing more discrimination due to wearing the *hijab* (head covering).

Difficulties at home and the community may be associated with how Muslim Arab American adolescents socialized. Arab cultures have typically been characterized as being collectivist or interdependent cultures, in which the self is defined in relation to others (Gregg, 2005). If a Muslim Arab American is a recent immigrant to the United States, he or she is likely to have been socialized within a different cultural context than his or her parents, leading to differences in cultural attitudes and values, and subsequent conflict within the home.

Despite the substantial number of Arab Americans, the continuing emigration of Arabs to the U.S., and their increased visibility due to the current social-political climate, there is limited research on the process of acculturation and psychological adjustment of Arab American youth. Further, there is a notable lack of research on Arab American populations overall and even less on Muslim Arab American adolescents. Previous studies have suggested that Canadian Arab youth who endorsed Arab cultural orientation, but not a European Canadian cultural orientation, reported great life satisfaction (Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012). Furthermore, a strong association has been shown between socio-cultural adversities (e.g., religious coping and support), discrimination, acculturative stress, and psychological distress among Arab American (Ahmed, Kia-Keating, & Tsai, 2011). Understanding their acculturative experiences and the relationship of these experiences to their psychological adjustment would help in the provision of culturally responsive assessment, intervention, and consultative services.

## Acculturation & Acculturative Stress

Acculturation has been widely studied as a way to understand the dynamic interactions between a person's culture of origin and culture of settlement. It is characterized as process of cultural and psychological change between groups or individuals (Berry, 2005). Research on acculturation has primarily used one of two models, either a unidimensional or a bidimensional approach. In

the unidimensional model, individuals from one culture assume the cultural norms, values, and beliefs of the culture in which they come into contact (Gordon, 1964). The bidimensional model, however, defines acculturation as the degree to which one maintains one's heritage culture and the degree to which one participates in the mainstream culture. Acculturation is viewed as a process by which an individual must negotiate the new culture while simultaneously determining whether to maintain the practices and beliefs of his or her heritage culture (Berry, 1997).

During the process of acculturation, some people may experience a variety of stressors associated with their personal characteristics, perceptions of the dominant culture about their group, or factors related to their immigration. Acculturative stress refers to "a response by individuals to life events (that are rooted in intercultural contact) when they exceed the capacity of individuals to deal with them" (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002, p. 362). Acculturative stress is the behavioral response to intercultural contact and is a way to understand how the interaction between cultures affects an individual psychologically. Immigrants' experiences of entering a new culture can differ based on how they are able to cope with the stressors related to acculturation, and can result in a variety of physical, psychological, and social changes.

Specifically, three dimensions of acculturative stress have been shown to be particularly relevant for ethnic minority or immigrant groups: environmental, attitudinal, and family factors (Fuertes & Westbrook, 1996). The environmental factors include subtle or overt acts of racism, attitudinal factors include difficulties stemming from being distant from families, friends, or heritage culture, and family factors relate to conflicts with the families' values or expectations. These multidimensional factors of acculturative stress can result in a variety of physical, psychological, and social changes. When individuals have the capacity to deal with the demands of acculturation and are able to make behavioral changes that are adaptive to the host culture, acculturative stress may not occur. However, for some individuals, the demands may exceed their ability to cope and consequently, they could experience acculturative stress.

Acculturative stress plays a critical role in the overall wellbeing of adolescents across a variety of immigrant groups. In a longitudinal study of immigrant adolescents in 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, Sirin and colleagues (2013) found that acculturative stress appeared to contribute significantly to psychological problems. Similarly, Ahmed, Kia-Keating, and Tsai (2011) examined socio-cultural adversities (including acculturative stress), cultural resources, and psychological distress and found a strong association between perceived discrimination, acculturative stress, and mental health. They argued that the pervasiveness of "anti-Arabism" in the current sociopolitical environment is an important consideration in understanding acculturative stress in this population.

## Acculturation, Acculturative Stress, & Psychological Adjustment

There have been a number of research studies showing the association between acculturation, acculturative stress, and psychological adjustment. Psychological adjustment is characterized in this study as both psychological problems (e.g., internalizing and externalizing problems) and overall competence (e.g., social skills, friendship). First, several studies have suggested that those immigrant and/or ethnic minority youth who identify with both the mainstream culture and their heritage culture have better overall mental health (e.g., Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). Specifically, youth who identify with both cultures appear to experience fewer psychological problems compared to youth who identify with either one or the other. For Muslim Arab American youth, it suggests that the degree to which they identify with a particular culture may affect their psychological adjustment.

There are a number of factors that affect the process of acculturation for Muslim and/or Arab American youth, including age, gender, and length of time living in the host culture. As a member of an ethnic group, the adolescent's development of the self and the relationship of the self to others may play a critical role in whether the adolescent maintains his or her heritage culture and/or has contact with and participation with the mainstream culture. Research studies have found that younger children differ in level of acculturation compared to older children, with younger children being more acculturated than older children (Berry, 1997).

In addition to age, there are acculturative differences between male and female youth. Previous studies with participants from Arab cultures have suggested that there may be gender differences in levels of acculturation (e.g., Ghaffarian, 1998). Women and girls may have more difficulty adapting to a new culture because of differences in gender roles and expectations. Girls, as compared to boys, may have to alter more of their behaviors (e.g., dress) to participate in the mainstream culture.

Finally, length of residence in the host culture has been found to be one of the strongest predictors of adjustment among immigrants (Zlobina, Basabe, Paez, & Furnham, 2006). Immigrants who have lived longer in a mainstream culture are more likely to desire contact with and participate in the new culture. Similarly, among adolescent immigrants, the length of residence in the mainstream culture is related to acculturation (Berry et al., 2006). These factors have an impact on the process of acculturation and overall mental health.

## Religiosity

Religiosity and religious affiliation have also been shown to play an important role in the acculturative experience of immigrant groups, particularly for Arab Americans. Religion, ethnicity, and culture are often inseparable. Religious practices, values, and beliefs are part of every aspect of an Arab American's life, including child-rearing, education, and relationships with others (Ajrouch, 2000). Religious practices therefore may pervade both ethnic and cultural practices and may be important variables to consider when examining Arab American acculturative experiences and psychological adjustment.

Religion is multifaceted and multidimensional and includes an individual's emotions, cognitions, and behavior (Hackney & Sanders, 2003). Religion has been examined in many different ways and religiosity is one component of religion that has been broadly defined as "phenomena that include some relevance to traditional institutionalized searches to acknowledge and maintain some relationship with the transcendent" (Hill & Hood, 1999). One way that religiosity has been conceptualized is in terms of three components: cognitive, affective, and behavioral (Cornwall, Albrecht, Cunningham, & Pitcher, 1986). The cognitive component of religiosity relates to the degree of orthodoxy or religiousness. The affective component relates to how an individual feels about beliefs, objects, and practices of religion. Finally, the behavioral component relates to religious practices and behaviors. Religiosity, therefore, is a multicomponent construct that includes thoughts and feelings, as well as behaviors.

Research has suggested that religiosity plays an important role in acculturation among Arab Americans. Studies have shown that Arab Americans who identified as Christians reported greater life satisfaction and acculturation to U.S. society than those who identified as Muslims (Amer & Hovey, 2005; Faragallah, Schumm, & Webb, 1997). Furthermore, Muslim Arab Americans who affirmed their Arab ethnic identity reported experiencing more discrimination compared to those who were Christian (Awad, 2010). Although these studies have shown differential experiences among Arab Americans, these studies included only adults. Other studies, however, have also shown that religiosity is related to acculturation among Arab American adolescents. Adolescents who reported using religious coping, who had higher ethnic identity, and who reported having religious support also reported fewer internalizing and externalizing psychological symptoms (Ahmed et al., 2011). Religiosity, therefore, may also play an important role in psychological adjustment among Muslim Arab American adolescents.

## Research Questions

This association between acculturation, religiosity, and psychological adjustment, as well as the negative perception of the Arab community within the United States, suggests a need for better understanding the acculturative experiences of Muslim Arab Americans. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to extend previous research by examining acculturation (mainstream and heritage cultural orientation), acculturative stress, religiosity and psychological adjustment among Muslim Arab American adolescents. Specifically, there are three primary research questions in this study: 1) Does age, gender, religiosity, and length of time in the United States predict acculturation among Muslim Arab American adolescents?, 2) Does age, gender, and length of time in the U.S. predict acculturative stress?, 3) How is acculturation, acculturative stress, and religiosity associated with psychological adjustment?

## Method

### Participants and Setting

Participants were recruited through a health clinic in a large Midwestern city. The clinic serves a large Arab American population as well as other ethnic groups. This area includes a population of about 70,000 native-born and 62,000 foreign-born Arab Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Participants were recruited by issuing invitations when parents made appointments in the health clinic and by using informational flyers posted in the clinic and community.

A total of 128 Muslim Arab American adolescents, between the ages of 11 and 21 (mean age 15.50,  $SD = 2.80$ ), participated in the study. Twenty-one participants did not indicate their age or gender on the questionnaire; as a result, some data are missing. Table 1 includes the demographic characteristics of the participants.

### Data Collection and Measures

The study was approved by a university human subjects board and supported by the community clinic. Three research assistants (two female, one male) who were current staff members at the clinic and fluent in both English and Arabic administered the measures. They completed the primary investigator's institutional Human Subject Research Protection Program training that involved web modules and quizzes. They also received intensive training from the first author in the research procedures. The first author did not have contact with participants. Parental consent and adolescent assent was obtained prior to ad-



TABLE 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Gender *	107	
Male	50	39.1
Female	57	44.5
Age *	107	
Middle School (11 - 13)	28	21.9
High School (14 - 17)	54	42.2
Post High School (18 - 21)	25	19.5
Religion		
Muslim	128	
Sunni	63	49.2
Shia	23	18.0
Both Sunni & Shia	1	0.8
Did not specify	41	32.0
Preferred Language at Home	128	
Mostly English	46	35.9
English & Arabic equally	67	52.3
Mostly Arabic	11	8.6
Only English	1	0.8
Another Language	3	2.3
Place of Birth	125	
U.S.	29	23.2
Other	96	76.8

\*Note: Gender and age were obtained from the Youth Self-Report (YSR) and 21 participants did not indicate age or gender.

ministering the measures. The adolescent completed a packet of surveys in either English ( $n = 127$ ) or Arabic ( $n = 1$ ), depending on the adolescent's language preference. Participants completed the measures independently with the research assistants present to answer questions.

**Demographic Questionnaire.** A 10-item questionnaire was developed by the researcher and adapted from Amer (2005) to obtain socio-demographic information on the adolescents. Items asked for information on age, sex, ethnicity, religious affiliation, preferred language at home, parent conflict, and peer ethnic group. Specific items include, "At home, do you speak . . ." and "What religion do you follow?"

**Acculturation.** The Vancouver Index of Acculturation (VIA) is a 20-item self-report using a bidimensional model of acculturation (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000). The VIA measures the degree to which an individual displays characteristics or behaviors associated with each culture using a 9-point Likert scale ("Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree"). Items on the VIA are categorized as values, social relationships, and adherence to traditions. Ten items are based on North American culture and 10 items are based on the heritage culture. An overall mean is calculated for each scale, with higher scores indicating higher association with the culture. Reliability ranged from 0.82 to 0.91 for



Heritage Culture and 0.85 to 0.89 for the Mainstream Culture subscale. Internal consistency reliability for the current study was  $\alpha = .86$  for Mainstream Culture and ( $\alpha = .94$ ) for Heritage Culture.

**Acculturative stress.** The Societal, Academic, Familial, and Environmental Acculturative Stress Scale: Children's Version (SAFE-C), a modified version of the Short SAFE created for children (Chavez, Moran, Reid, & Lopez, 1997), was used in this study because it is relevant and developmentally appropriate for an adolescent population (e.g., items regarding parents and peers in school). The SAFE-C consists of 36 items with three subscales using a 6-point Likert-type format. The General Social Stress (GSS) scale includes 16 items related to general stressors that all children may experience, regardless of ethnicity. The Process-Oriented Stress (PO) subscale measures the process of acculturation and includes items such as "People think I am shy, when I really just have trouble speaking English." The Perceived Discrimination Stress (PD) subscale includes items such as "Because of the group I am in, I don't get the grades I deserve." Scores obtained on the SAFE-C range from 0 and 180, with higher scores indicating higher levels of acculturative stress. The SAFE-C has good reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86 and validity (Chavez et al., 1997). In the current study, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.75 was found.

**Religiosity.** Four domains of the Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiosity/Spirituality (BMMRS; Fetzer Institute & National Institute on Aging Working Group, 1999) were administered. The original BMMRS is a 54-item scale designed to measure 11 key domains of religiosity and spirituality. In this study, Organizational Religiosity (ORG), Private Religious Practices (PRP), and Overall Spirituality and Religiosity (OSR) domains were included. Reliability estimates was found for ORG ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ), PRP ( $\alpha = 0.72$ ), and OSR ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ; Fetzer Institute & National Institute on Aging Working Group, 1999). Four domains were chosen to capture important components of religiosity, such as the frequency of attendance in religious organizations, involvement in informal religious activities, as well as subjective reports of religiosity and spirituality. Previous studies that included the BMMRS with adolescents (e.g., Pearce, Little, & Perez, 2003) have shown that the four domains are appropriate for measuring religiosity with this population. Due to the four domains being highly intercorrelated (range .474 to .517), a Religiosity Composite was then computed by summing the scale scores. Reliability of the scale was  $\alpha = 0.80$ .

**Social desirability.** To minimize response bias, the Reynolds Short Form A of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960) was administered. The Reynolds Short Form A is an 11-item True/False measure with scores (2 – 22) calculated by determining whether the respondent's answer matches the keyed response (6 false, 5 true). High scores suggest high social desirability responding. Studies show good reliability ( $\alpha = 0.74$ ) (Barger, 2002). Reliability for the current study was good ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ).

**Psychological adjustment.** An English or Arabic version of the Youth Self-Report (YSR; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001) measures social and emotional functioning of children between the ages of 11 and 18. Two components of YSR include Social Competence and Total Problems. Social Competence (20 items) measures the child's preferences in activities, friendship, and performance on academic subjects. Total Problems scale (112 items) measures internalizing and externalizing problems. The YSR has high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .79$ ). In the current study, reliability was good ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

## Results

Data were screened for distributional characteristics (normality, skewness, kurtosis, and outliers). The Marlowe-Crowne Scale was examined to determine the degree to which participants responded in socially desirable ways. Mean responses were 6.89 ( $SD = 2.49$ ) and a median of 7, suggesting that participants tended to show an average degree of concern related to their responses. Given that there was not a high degree of social desirability and to ensure parsimony in the regression analyses, the variable was excluded from the analyses.

Zero-order correlations were obtained on all variables as an exploratory look at potential linear relationships (Table 2). Results showed significant negative correlations between length of time living in the U.S. and process-oriented stress, perceived discrimination stress, and global stress. Furthermore, there were significant positive correlations between VIA-A and perceived discrimination stress (SAFE-C POS) and global stress (SAFE-C GSS), suggesting self-reported orientation with American culture was associated with higher acculturative stress. Heritage cultural orientation (VIA-H) was significantly negatively correlated with YSR Total Problems but not correlated with overall competence, suggesting self-reported orientation to Arab culture was associated with lower self-reported psychological problems but not higher or lower competence. Finally, SAFE-C GSS was associated with YSR-Total Problems and negatively associated with YSR-Total Competence. Adolescents who reported higher global stress associated with acculturation reported more psychological problems and less overall competence.

A series of simultaneous regressions were performed to assess the predictive strength of a variety of models. The first set of regression models examined the predictive ability of age, gender, religiosity, and length of time in the U.S. on acculturation, both VIA-A and VIA-H. The model for VIA-A was found to be not statistically significant [ $F(4, 93) = 1.75, p = .15$ ]. The model for VIA-H however was found to be statistically significant [ $F(4, 92) = 4.10, p = .004, R^2 = .15$ ]. Religiosity proved to be the strongest predictor of VIA-H [ $\beta = .35, p < .01$ ].

TABLE 2. Correlations of Variables

Variables	Zero-order <i>r</i>										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Length in U.S.		.70**	-.02	.02	-.33**	-.26**	-.29**	.01	.21*	.12	-.11
2. Age			.04	-.06	-.34**	-.23*	-.39**	-.01	.13	.12	-.04
3. VIA-A				.21*	.11	.19*	.29**	.01	-.23*	.11	-.07
4. VIA-H					-.13	-.10	-.02	-.24*	.10	.28**	.01
5. SAFE-C POS						.70**	.51**	.31**	-.13	-.22*	-.18*
6. SAFE-C DIS							.61**	.25**	-.27*	-.27*	-.08
7. SAFE-C GSS								.35**	-.46**	-.19*	-.18*
8. YSR Total Problems									-.26*	-.14	-.29**
9. YSR Total Competence										.17	.05
10. REL-Composite											.01
11. Marlowe Crowne											

Note: VIA = Vancouver Index of Acculturation; VIA-A = VIA American Scale, VIA-H = VIA Heritage Scale; SAFE-C = Societal, Academic, Familial, and Environmental Acculturative Stress Scale—Children's Version; YSR = Youth Self-Report; REL-Composite = religiosity

\*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$

The second set of regression models examined the predictive ability of age, gender, religiosity, and length in the US on acculturative stress (GSS, PD, and POS). All three models were statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). The GSS model came out statistically significant [ $F(4, 93) = 4.92, p = .001, R^2 = .18$ ]. More specifically, age, gender, religiosity, and length of time in the U.S. predicted 18% of the variance in general social stress.

The PD model came out statistically significant [ $F(4, 93) = 6.67, p = .001, R^2 = .22$ ] and had statistically significant effects for gender ( $\beta = -.18, p = .04$ ), religiosity ( $\beta = -.24, p = .01$ ), and length of time in the US ( $\beta = -.31, p = .02$ ). Overall, the model explained 22% of the variance in PD. The POS model was also statistically significant [ $F(4, 93) = 7.03, p = .001, R^2 = .23$ ]. In this model, religiosity predicted POST ( $\beta = -.21, p = .02$ ). Overall, the model explained 23% of the variance in POS.

The third and final set of regression models examined the predictive strength of VIA-A, VIA-H, and SAFE-C on Psychological Adjustment, as measured by YSR-Total Problems and YSR-Competence. Both models came out statistically significant. Specifically, the YSR-Total Problems model explained 18.5% of variance [ $F(3, 102) = 7.70, p = .001, R^2 = .185$ ] with VIA-H ( $\beta = -.20, p = .04$ ) and SAFE-C ( $\beta = .36, p = .001$ ) both being statistically significant predictors. The YSR-Competence model explained 19% of the variance [ $F(3, 95) = 7.26, p = .001, R^2 = .19$ ] with both VIA-A ( $\beta = -.20, p = .04$ ) and SAFE-C ( $\beta = -.33, p = .001$ ) coming out statistically significant.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine acculturation, acculturative stress, religiosity and psychological adjustment among Muslim Arab American adolescents. The first goal was to determine whether Muslim Arab American adolescents' age, gender, religiosity, and length of time in the United States predicts acculturation. Overall, results of the study showed that these variables significantly predicted heritage cultural orientation but not mainstream cultural orientation. In particular, age, gender, and time in the U.S., religiosity predicted heritage cultural orientation. That is, Muslim Arab American adolescents who endorsed higher religiosity reported a stronger orientation to their heritage culture. Previous studies with Muslim young adults have found a positive association between intensity of faith and orientation toward their heritage culture (Saroglou & Mathijssen, 2007). Similarly, intrinsic religiosity with Islam has been found to be associated with reduced acculturation to the host culture (Friedman & Saroglou, 2010). The current study extends these findings for Muslim Arab American adolescents. Religion plays an important role in their orientation toward their Arab heritage culture, and following the principles of Islam may be closely tied with Muslim Arab American adolescents sense of ethnic community and identity.

The second goal of the study was to examine whether age, gender, religiosity, and length of time living in the U.S predicted acculturative stress. Results showed that, as a group, these variables significantly predicted general social stress, perceived discrimination stress, and process-oriented stress. Furthermore, results showed that length of time in the United States significantly negatively correlated to perceived discrimination stress. Specifically, the longer a Muslim Arab American adolescent has lived in the United States, the less the adolescent reports experiencing stress related to discrimination. These results suggest that as the adolescent is exposed to the values, traditions, and culture of mainstream America across time, they are less likely to report experiencing stress associated with discrimination. These results extend previous findings by Ahmed and colleagues (2011) that demonstrate the importance of perceived discrimination as a factor in the development and acculturation of Arab American adolescents.

Overall, religiosity was found to be a significant predictor across perceived discrimination stress and process-oriented acculturative stress. Results showed that the more Muslim Arab American adolescents endorsed religiosity, the less they experienced stress associated with acculturation. Being a member of a religious community, perceiving support from God, and practicing their religion may be protective factors from the stress of acculturation for these adolescents. Previous research with Arab American adolescents suggested that religious coping and support play an important role in the process of acculturation (Ahmed et al., 2011).

The final goal of the study was to examine whether acculturation and acculturative stress predicted psychological adjustment among Arab American adolescents. First, the results of the study found that acculturation and acculturative stress significantly predicted psychological problems. These results align with the previous research showing an association between acculturation, acculturative stress, and psychological problems across a variety of ethnic minority and/or immigrant groups (Lopez, Ehly, & Garcia-Vazquez, 2002) as well as with Arab American adolescents (Ahmed et al., 2011). Immigrant or ethnic minority groups who maintain their cultural traditions and values may experience fewer psychological problems because they are able to identify with, and feel a part of, their ethnic community (Greene, Way, & Pahl, 2006). This connection and support may, in turn, provide a buffer to stressors and reduce the likelihood for the manifestation of a psychological disorder.

Results of the study also suggested that acculturation and acculturative stress predicted overall competence, such as an adolescent's ability to make and maintain friendships, involvement in organizations and teams, and performance in school. This relationship between acculturative stress and overall competence may be related to aspects of resilience and post-traumatic growth. Adolescents who have experienced stress may also have an increased self-awareness, discover more meaning in their lives, and develop closer relationships (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). There was also a negative association between mainstream American cultural orientation and competence. Muslim Arab American adolescents who endorsed their American culture reported lower scores on overall social competence; however, there was no statistically significant association between heritage cultural orientation and overall social competence. Developmental models of ethnic identity suggest that strong, secure ethnic identity is associated with better psychological wellbeing across a number of immigrant groups (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). Similarly, within this sample of Muslim Arab American youth, stronger orientation to their Arab culture is associated with fewer psychological problems, but not necessarily associated with higher social competence. There may be other factors beyond acculturation associated with adolescent friendship skills, involvement in organizations, and academic performance. For example, peer relationships or family conflict may also play a role in an adolescent's development of competence.

## Implications

The results of this study have a number of implications for practitioners working with Muslim Arab American youth. First, practitioners should consider the importance of religion and culture when working with Muslim Arab American adolescents. Being a member of the Muslim faith includes both faith-based

(e.g., prayers) and social-based practices (e.g., working with charitable organizations). Therefore, when working with a child, practitioners should consider whether the religious community has an important role in that child's life. Indeed, including cultural and religious consultants (e.g., the imam) may be important in the provision of services (Abu-Ras, Gheith, & Cournos, 2008).

Practitioners should also consider how to assess the acculturation and related stressors when working with Muslim Arab American youth, and the ways that these experiences may affect mental health. Goforth (2011) recommends that practitioners use a multisystem approach gather various kinds of information from the child as well as the immediate and extended family, including levels of acculturation, educational and child-care practices in their home country, and immigration history. By understanding these factors, practitioners can better understand how the acculturative experiences may have affected the child.

### Limitations

Additional studies are needed that include a larger sample of Arab American youth from diverse areas of the United States (and not just from a community with a large number of Arab Americans). Similarly, given the heterogeneity among Arab Americans, future research studies should examine diverse cultural practices and beliefs within this group. Future research should also examine how religion is related to acculturative stress, particularly whether a Muslim Arab American youth's religiosity and spirituality may provide a buffer for acculturative stress. Finally, this study did not specifically examine how an adolescent identifies with their ethnicity and the degree to which their sense of self is associated with their ethnic group (Phinney, 1990). Future research could examine Arab American ethnic identity and its association with overall mental health. Cultural identity may provide a sense of collective support and shared experience in facing prejudice and other stressors among Arab American adolescents.

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